







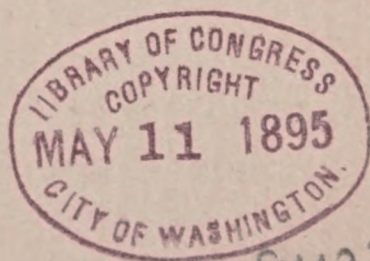
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DR. ENDICOTT'S EXPERIMENT

BY ✓

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DR. ENDICOTT'S EXPERIMENT.

CHAPTER I.

THE PROLOGUE.

WHY were they friends? Why should men so different in tastes and temperament seek each other out, and be knit in the bonds of a fellowship as close as brotherhood? That was the question that people asked again and again when they saw Harry Crawford and Stephen Endicott together; but it was not a question that could be easily answered.

They had been at the same college, and they had come from the same sleepy little country town, where they had known each other since their boyish days; but these reasons would have been equally potent to sever them, had they not been resolved not to be severed. For their social positions were different, and social position counts for more in a quiet country neighborhood than it does in Cambridge or London.

Stephen Endicott's father had been a chemist in the town of Bourneby, while Harry Crawford was the only son of a country squire. Of the two men, Endicott, the chemist, was perhaps the wealthier ; but old Mr. Crawford had a house full of historical associations, and a park well-stocked with venerable trees, and he was held in great consideration by his neighbors, who did not think much of Stephen Endicott.

Yet the two boys drew together. They made acquaintance in some fishing excursion, where young Stephen rescued Harry Crawford from a perilous position ("saved his life," Harry Crawford always said), and afterward shared his lunch and a basket of trout with him. The two were always meeting after that. During school terms they were, of course, separated ; for Harry went to Rugby, and Stephen to the Bourneby Grammar School ; but the chief delight of their vacations was to meet and compare experiences, and to explore the hidden recesses of every wood and dale within a ten-mile radius of the celebrated old church of Bourneby town. Possibly this delight in exploration was the bond of union, although it was founded upon a different basis in each of the boys.

Stephen was a born naturalist, a scientist by nature, a keen observer of the world, and something of a genius.

Harry cared nothing for science, but had the instincts of a country gentleman of sporting tendencies, who liked an outdoor life, and prided himself on his knowledge of the habits of furred and feathered things. Indeed he used to mourn bitterly, during his younger days, at the adverse fate which prevented him from becoming a gamekeeper by profession. The only quarrels that arose between the boys proceeded from Harry's desire to kill and Stephen's to observe and classify. It was not that Harry was cruel by disposition ; but he liked to hunt, and conquer, and slay ; while Stephen was inclined to save and protect.

The squire grumbled at first over Harry's predilection for "the apothecary's boy" ; but he soon ceased to protest. He was very indulgent to his only son, and would have tolerated a much more objectionable person than young Stephen Endicott for Harry's sake. But it never became more than tolerance. He did not "take to" the clever lad, whose praises Harry was never tired of singing. There was something repellent to him in Stephen's very cleverness, in his reticence and his self-control.

Old Mr. Endicott retired from business when Stephen was about fifteen. He bought a house which he considered a vast improvement on the old one be-

hind the shop, and lived there contentedly, although it was, after all, rather small and dark, with a cheerful prospect of a large dissenting chapel and a graveyard in front of it. He would, perhaps, have gone further out of the town but for Stephen's desire to be well in reach of the grammar school and the masters, with whom he was such a favorite. At this time he was absorbed in study. His father was very proud of him, and delighted to think that he was going to "make a gentleman" of his son.

At eighteen Stephen took a university scholarship, and henceforth his career seemed to be decided. There was no question about making a tradesman of him. He was sent to Cambridge, to the very college where the name of Harry Crawford, a few months younger, was also entered, and henceforth the two youths almost lived together. There was much less social difference between them at Cambridge than at Bourneby. Stephen was the richer of the two, but the less popular ; he rowed well, but did not, like Crawford, spend all his time in athletic exercise ; he worked hard and distinguished himself, while Crawford was continually in scrapes, and narrowly escaped rustication more than once. Not that he was ever involved in anything more serious than troubles begotten of boyish thoughtlessness and impetuosity : but these are faults which

often land a young man in circumstances of considerable perplexity.

However, Harry came safely, though not with distinction, through his college career, and was as much delighted when his friend gained scholarships and university prizes as if they had fallen to his own share. Stephen Endicott was universally acknowledged to be the best man of the year ; and he would have had a very good chance of a secure position at Cambridge, if he would have made up his mind to stay. But he had no mind to be a mathematical coach all his days, or even to attain a scientific professorship.

He had one decided bent ; one ambition ; and he was sometimes disposed to grumble that his college life had been simply an obstacle to the career that he meant to follow. He wanted to be a doctor, and a doctor he would be.

His father was not pleased by his choice of a profession, which he measured by his own experience of country practitioners ; but he made no serious objection to Stephen's wishes. The young man went to London and Paris ; he made his training as complete and as perfect as possible before he announced to his father that he was now ready to start upon his life-work. He had been offered an important post in a London hospital already ; he hesitated between

accepting it or devoting himself more particularly to scientific research.

And then the little world which knew him was horrified to hear that he had accepted a country practice, and settled down in a back street at Bourneby.

He never explained. He did not tell his friends that he had come home to find his father growing infirm and irritable and lonely, that the old man had reproached him for the sacrifices which had been made for his education, and which had brought so little comfort to the lives of others, and that he, Stephen, had answered gently: "Never mind, father, I've come home now to stay." His reward had lain in the old man's brightening eye, in the knowledge that he was making his father happy, and that he had the consciousness of doing right.

With this conviction he was fairly content, even though he had hard work, scant leisure, and little thanks. One disappointment alone awaited him for which he was not prepared. He saw nothing, or next to nothing, of his old friend Harry Crawford. The young squire was traveling, or in London, or busy with guests at the Hall. He was just as cordial and affectionate as ever when he met Dr. Endicott, but Stephen felt a little grieved now and then to think that the days of real intimacy were at an end. He was lonelier than he knew.

But the period of waiting—of probation, if you like to call it so—was comparatively short. In two years old Mr. Endicott died. And three months afterward Harry Crawford called in Red Lion Street, where Stephen still lived in the corner house opposite the Methodist chapel, with the big green graveyard laid out like a garden in front of it, and asked, with some curiosity, what were his plans.

“I am not sure that I have any plans,” said Dr. Endicott dryly. “What are yours? They will be more interesting.”

Harry Crawford looked at him for a moment. The two friends were more unlike than ever; and perhaps Mr. Crawford of Bourneby Hall had a new sense of that unlikeness as he looked.

Stephen Endicott was a little over thirty at this time, and looked older. He was a tall, spare, muscular man, with not an ounce of superfluous flesh about him; his dark hair was already growing thin at the top, and the dark whiskers, of regulation cut, on either side of his lean, pale face, were thin likewise. His forehead was magnificent; he had a big bony nose, a strong jaw, a big thin-lipped mouth, deep-set gray eyes, and a grave, abstracted expression; he was not a handsome man, certainly, but a noticeable one, with a look of rugged strength which generally attracted attention.

It should not be forgotten that he had very beautiful hands ; hands that were at once strong, supple, and delicately sensitive ; suggestive of faculties which are popularly supposed to belong to the artist rather than the scientific man. He wore a very shabby study coat, and leaned back in his semicircular wooden chair, with the air of a busy man interrupted in his business. The table at which he was seated was heavy and old-fashioned ; probably a dining table requisitioned for his own purposes. It was well covered with books and papers ; but these were all neatly arranged ; as were also the numerous jars and bottles of specimens that stood on shelves round the room. There was a very fine microscope, under a glass shade, on a stand of its own near the window ; some apparatus for experiments on another table, and a chair or two. It was not a sumptuously furnished apartment.

Harry Crawford had perched himself on a corner of the big center table, and was flicking his riding boots with his whip. He was not as tall as Stephen, and somewhat burlier and heavier in build, but he was certainly a much handsomer man. He was a little florid in countenance ; his features were well cut, his glossy hair of a golden brown, and his eyes blue and smiling. It was not an unintelligent face ; it showed good sense

and practical power ; probably he would make an excellent county magistrate, a famous M. F. H., a just landlord, an affectionate husband and father. It was impossible to know him and not like him ; and cold as Stephen Endicott might appear, his heart warmed to the genial presence, and he was, in Harry's company, a pleasanter—perhaps a better—man.

“My plans ?” said Crawford at last, with a laugh. “You've heard something about them, eh ?”

“I have heard a rumor.”

“Well, it's true—at least, I suppose you have heard what is true. I'm going to be married next month.”

“To Miss Norreys ?”

“Yes ; you know her ?”

“Very slightly ; I attended her last winter.”

Harry looked a little alarmed. “What was the matter with her ? I hope she was not ill ?”

“It was a little touch of bronchitis. I suppose the proper thing is to congratulate you, Harry ; but——”

“What do you mean ?” said Crawford, in an annoyed tone. “I should think it was the proper thing to congratulate a fellow on marrying the loveliest and best girl in the world.”

“She is very beautiful and very nice in every way, I believe ; but—she is not very strong.”

"Is that all?"

"Certainly; isn't it enough? You cannot think that I am unprofessional enough to congratulate you on marrying a sickly woman, who will want to be treated like a hot-house plant. I beg your pardon, my dear Crawford, I know you don't like to hear this; but I must warn you that I am not altogether delighted at your choice of Miss Norreys, because I consider her health extremely delicate. She will want great care."

"Do you suppose she will not get it? I think you are taking an unfair advantage of your professional knowledge, Endicott. It is too bad to lessen a girl's chances in that way, by calling her sickly."

"I do not seem to have lessened them. I have not interfered. I must say I did wish that you had come to me first, Harry. I have often told you that I consider the first and best quality of a wife is good health."

"Is there anything really wrong with Lilian Norreys?"

"Not that I know of," said Stephen, rather reluctantly. "I think she has no stamina, no physique; that's all. I think that you will have to be very careful of her. Winter in the South; avoid anxiety; let her never be worried. Then perhaps she will do very well."

"You doctors are such frightful croakers," said Harry, evidently reas-

sured. "I'll take every care in the world of her ; you'll see she will be all right. And it is positively absurd ! Why, she is the most blooming girl I know. Look at her color ! look at her eyes ! see how she dances ! Why, you'll tell me I am an invalid before long."

"You don't look much like one, but appearances are deceptive," said Stephen, with good humor. "Well, take the warning I've given you, and my congratulations also. I could not give one without the other. Apart from health"—with a grave smile—"I think that you have made an excellent choice. Miss Norreys is a pearl among women."

"Isn't she !" said Harry, with great gusto. "'A perfect woman, nobly planned,' and all the rest of it. And isn't she lovely ? I never saw anyone half so beautiful ; and when I think that she is going to be mine—my wife ! I hardly know whether I stand on my head or my heels, and that's the fact. Why don't you get married ? You would be twice as happy as you are now ; and you have nobody to please but yourself !"

Stephen smiled. "I am, perhaps, not easily pleased," he said.

"Perfect health is the first requisite, of course," said Harry, in a rallying tone ; but Dr. Endicott took the speech seriously.

"Yes, you are right ; I think more of that than of beauty. A perfectly sound organization ; calm, strong nerves, a clear, unclouded brain, a well-balanced mind—all these things come with health. I have seen a person," he went on deliberately, "in whom these qualities are combined ; and I think it is highly probable that I shall marry her."

Harry Crawford almost gasped. "Heavens, man !" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to dispense with the slight preliminary of falling in love?"

Stephen reddened, but there was no trace of annoyance on his brow as he replied :

"I have a great affection for the lady of whom I am speaking ; but I doubt whether I am capable of the emotions that you are experiencing just now, Harry. I had something of the sort—ten years ago. It is not likely to recur. A calm, temperate regard for my wife is all that I have to offer her, but I think it will suffice to make her happy."

"The deuce it will ! And who is the object of your temperate regard ? Do I know her ?"

"You may have seen her," said the doctor, in a low voice. "She is a second cousin of mine ; she helped to nurse my father when he was ill. She is living in the house now with her mother."

"I remember her," said Crawford

shortly. "Ah well! perhaps you may make her happy."

He had seen a gentle, dowdy, quiet-looking girl, with downcast eyes and a round, rosy face, going about the passages sometimes; and he recognized the fact that she was the very embodiment of Dr. Endicott's ideal. Perfectly healthy—that was the chief thing! He could almost have laughed aloud as he contrasted her mentally with the vision of Lilian's exquisite, ethereal loveliness. The one was of earth, he said to himself, the other of heaven.

Stephen understood the slighting intonation and changed the subject

"I am selling the practice here," he said, "and going up to London."

"Glad to hear it," said Crawford briskly. "Not for my own sake; it'll be an awful loss to me; but I am sure you will do better in town. Going to practice?"

"No, I think not. I have an income, you know; and I want to make certain researches." He hesitated, and as he resumed, his voice trembled as it had never done when he spoke of marriage. "I have a theory which only wants perfecting to revolutionize the whole treatment of certain forms of disease. I have some experiments to make. I can do them better in London than I can here."

"Some new discovery imminent, eh?"

said Crawford, rather flippantly. "I hope it will immortalize you, old man. Really important, is it?"

Stephen Endicott's dark eyes suddenly flashed beneath the heavy brows. "There is one form of disease," he said, "which is too often called incurable. It seems to me that I have my finger on the cure. I do not care whether my name is remembered or not, but if I can make this discovery, and save the human race from this scourge of loathsome, agonizing disease, I shall feel that I have not lived in vain."

The subdued enthusiasm of his manner impressed Crawford a good deal. "What's the disease?" he asked, with some curiosity.

Dr. Endicott answered shortly, and as if he had no wish to discuss the subject, "Cancer."

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "Rather you than me," he said. "Glad I'm not a doctor! Well, old fellow, I hope you'll be successful. I have the greatest possible faith in you, and am sure you'll make a name for yourself. Don't forget us humble folk in the country when you are a fashionable physician. I shall expect you to doctor Lilian, you know, if ever she is ill." He rose to go, and Endicott rose also. "You'll come to the wedding, of course. I want you to be the best man."

"I'm afraid I can't," said Stephen.

"I shall be in London by that time, and probably," with a nervous laugh, "married myself."

"So soon? I wish you joy, old man. You'll come and stay with me next Christmas? I wish you could have come to the wedding."

"I wish I could," said Stephen. And the two men said good-by with a long, warm clasping of hands, and a look in which more affection was expressed than could have been measured by words.

But their paths in life were widely different. And as it fell out, they did not meet again until full ten years had passed.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

THE old house in Harley Street seemed strangely hot and oppressive to the country visitor who was admitted to its sacred precincts. Outside the sun was still shining, and in the pleasant home from which he came he knew that every window would be open to admit the soft summer air and the scent of a hundred flowers. Here, the windows were shut, or opened only for a few inches at the top; the lamps were already lighted, and there was a distinct and stifling odor of dinner in the hall.

The butler, who had been called to answer the stranger's questions, was distinctly unfriendly and offended.

"I think, sir," he said loftily, "that you are, perhaps, in search of Dr. Enscott, who lives over the way. The names are often confounded. My master very seldom sees patients—especially at this hour—without previous appointment."

He seemed to swell with indignation as he spoke: his position as the butler of a well-known consulting physician, whose fees were steadily rising, seemed to have slightly turned his brain. The stranger, a big, handsome man, well dressed, with an indefinably provincial air, broke in angrily upon his speech.

"Didn't I tell you I was an old friend?" he said. "Take my card to your master at once. If he is at home, he will see me."

The butler yielded to the imperious tone rather than to the words. He silently ushered the gentleman into a waiting room and took the card to his master, as desired.

The physician was at dinner. In spite of the self-importance of his servant, the appointments of Dr. Endicott's table were very simple. There were no elaborate dishes, no expensive fruit and flowers, and the wine was almost untouched. Perhaps the doctor did not approve of costly fare, or perhaps he

ordered that simple food should be chosen for the sake of the one person who shared his evening meal.

For it was a very small and young person who was his chief companion, namely, his daughter Alice, who was just seven years old. His wife had died two years ago, and Alice had been sent down to dinner ever since.

It was very bad for her, as the nurses and the governesses said. She ought to have been in bed by that time. She was not allowed to eat much on these occasions, certainly, and they did not happen more than two or three times a week, for Dr. Endicott went out a good deal ; but the child could not be put to bed until after nine o'clock, and that was, as everybody knew, a disgracefully late hour for a baby of six or seven years old.

Perhaps Dr. Endicott was selfish in the matter. He argued that he was busy or out all day, and could only now and then secure even this opportunity of seeing his little daughter. To one anxious governess, indeed, he gave a promise that, if he saw signs that little Alice was growing nervous and delicate, he would give up keeping her out of her bed after seven o'clock. But at present there seemed no likelihood that this desirable consummation would be reached. Alice was beautiful and blooming ; she had never had a day's illness in her life, and was an example of the perfect health

and strength that a doctor's daughter ought properly to represent.

She made a pretty picture in her white dress, with the golden waves of hair half concealing her sweet little face, whence the great dark eyes looked forth with gentle confidence upon a world which had always been kind to her. It was a curious fact that although neither of her parents had been particularly handsome, she should have developed a rare and winning type of beauty : a type which, as Dr. Endicott would have triumphantly pointed out, grounded in the first place from perfect soundness of constitution, health of function, and symmetry of limb. She was an example, he would say, of what every child ought to be.

She sat beside him at the table as gravely as any grown woman could have done, and ate the strawberries he gave her with perfect content. Now and then she addressed a remark to him which he answered, but for the most part the two did not speak. Dr. Endicott was a silent man, and Alice, at seven years old, understood him perfectly.

The butler came in and presented the card on a silver salver, in an apologetic way. "The gentleman would not be kept out, sir," he said, as his master looked at him inquiringly. "He said you would know him." And then the doctor looked with a frown at the card.

“Crawford!” he exclaimed, his face clearing. “Of course! of course! I will go to him.” And he rose at once. “In the waiting room, you said?” He disappeared into the hall; while little Alice sat gravely watching between her clouds of golden hair.

“Did the gentleman look like another doctor, Moseley?” she asked anxiously, as the butler lingered in the doorway.

“No, miss, not at all. Like a gentleman from the country, miss,” said Moseley promptly.

“Papa has no friends in the country,” said Alice, rather as if speaking to herself than to the servant.

“Perhaps it is a patient of your papa’s, miss,” said Moseley. “Don’t you think you had better go to the drawing room, miss, until your papa can join you?”

He knew quite well that the child went straight to bed from the dinner table, but he always kept up the polite fiction that she, as mistress of the house, occupied the drawing room in the evening.

“No, thank you, Moseley,” said Alice with dignity. “I shall wait and see papa’s friend from the country. Perhaps he has little girls and boys of his own.”

She waited, but not for long, as the sounds of returning steps and voices were soon heard.

“This way, Crawford,” she heard her

father say, with unusual cordiality of tone. "We can talk better here; you can't have had any dinner, and you look fagged out."

"London is so confoundedly hot," said the other voice; and Dr. Endicott showed his visitor into the dining room, where he made a sudden stop as he caught sight of the fairy in white at the table.

"You here still, Alice? You had better run away," said her father. "It is my little girl, Harry."

Harry Crawford, redder and burlier than he used to be, and considerably harassed and heated, had still a kindly eye and genial smile; and Alice's little face brightened as she looked up at him and held out her hand in her sedate, old-fashioned way.

"So you are Stephen's little girl, are you?" said the newcomer. "Give me a kiss, my dear. I wish I had a little girl, too. I've only a boy, a year or two older than you, I think. Perhaps your father will bring you down to see him one of these days."

He looked after her wistfully when the door was closed and she had departed to the nursery.

"She's a beautiful little thing, Stephen. I suppose her mother——"

"Her mother died two years ago," said Dr. Endicott, gravely.

"Ah!" with a sort of a groan.

"These things come to all of us, don't they?" He turned and grasped Endicott's arm. "You will be able to feel for me. You know what it is to lose one who is dear to you—to feel that you can do nothing—absolutely nothing. You will be able to understand as nobody else can do."

He wiped the moisture from his forehead.

"Don't ring, Endicott; don't order anything for me. I couldn't touch it. I'll take a glass of claret and a biscuit. Phew! This London of yours suffocates me. I wonder how you can live here—and bring up a child, too. I could not sleep in town. I shall take the night mail back to Peterborough."

"You would be better for a substantial meal, Harry," said the doctor. "A little soup and a cutlet, eh? You would feel refreshed then. When did you eat last, I wonder? Now, don't protest. You have something to tell me; but I will not hear it until you have had some food."

Mr. Crawford protested again, but more feebly. Possibly he felt that there was some truth in what his friend said; and with a few half-inarticulate grunts and groans he subsided into quietness, and ate the meal that was provided with tolerable appetite. During this interlude Stephen Endicott leaned back in the chair and examined his old friend

with attention. Different as they had always been, the difference was now more strongly marked than ever.

Dr. Endicott was lean, pale, intellectual-looking ; and the refinement of his traits was very strongly marked. His hair had retreated from his high forehead, and was a little thin, but it was still dark, although his whiskers were slightly touched with gray. He was habitually grave, but his manner was less cold than it had been in his youth. Perhaps the loss of his wife and the love of his child had softened his nature and subdued his heart.

His friend, Harry Crawford, had broadened and reddened, as men of his type are apt in middle life to do. His handsome features had grown a little coarse, his blue eyes had sunk, his short, curly hair had lost its gloss and color ; altogether, he had the puffy, florid look of a man hopelessly "out of condition," and destined by the life he had chosen to grow more and more so.

It was easy to see how self-pleasing, how soft and complacent had been the course of his days. He had known little of care and trouble. He had been wealthy ; or had at least lived as if he were wealthy. He had forgotten how to think for himself, and, more than all, how to think for others. And to this man some crisis had arrived ; something had happened which had disorganized

the whole of his life. So much Dr. Endicott could see at a glance ; and while the squire consumed his meal the physician took in every detail of his appearance, and wondered, somewhat indifferently, whether his agitation meant illness, loss of money, or domestic bereavement. But until the meal was finished he would not hear.

When Mr. Crawford had pushed away his plate and had drained his glass of its last drop of iced whisky and soda, which the doctor had compounded for him, he turned to his old friend with an uncertain look, and breathed a heavy sigh.

"Well, well !" he said. "You were right, Stephen ; I feel better now. I've touched nothing since morning, and I'm not the sort that can do without regular meals. But I was thoroughly upset. I have not got over the shock yet, and never shall—I never shall !"

"Come into my study," Stephen said easily. "We shall be cooler there. This room is a little too hot ; it's a sultry night."

"Yes, by Jove ! it is !" Crawford answered, rising from his chair. "How you can live in London passes my comprehension. You were brought up in the country, just as I was, and liked it even better——"

"My profession keeps me in London, you see," said the doctor. They were

crossing the hall as he spoke, and he was glad to keep his friend's attention fixed for a little while on casual matters. The man's half subdued excitement, threatening now and then to break out in some ungovernable manner, had put him upon his guard. "I should not have much chance if I lived in a small country place, far from hospitals and laboratories, should I? My profession is my life—you can hardly understand that, I dare say."

He ushered the visitor into his study, a room that was comfortable enough, but which seemed painfully close and dark to the country squire. He looked round with half concealed contempt on the velvet chairs and sofa, the thick Turkey carpet, the heavy chenille curtains, the black marble of the mantel-piece, the bronzes and heavy time-piece with which it was decorated. Dr. Endicott turned up the gas, and wheeled a big easy-chair toward his guest. Harry Crawford dropped into it with a sigh. Oh, for a breath of fresh country air, for the scent of roses, and the sweet tones of a woman's voice! The remembrance brought back a crushing sense of trouble, and quite unconsciously he groaned aloud.

Dr. Endicott, with his back to him, took no apparent notice. He was reaching down a box of cigars from an upper shelf in an ebony cupboard.

"You smoke, Harry?" he said gently. "So do I sometimes, in this private sanctum of mine. This is not my consulting room; I can't have cigars there, you know. Want a match?"

"Thanks," said Crawford absently. He lighted his cigar and took a puff or two, while the doctor seated himself in a wooden chair near the writing table and made a cigarette for himself. It did not escape his notice that after the first minute or two Crawford let his cigar go out, and held it in his hand as he stared into vacancy. It was a bad sign. The time had come, the doctor decided, when Crawford had better speak.

"Well," he said kindly, "there is something you want to tell me, I think, Harry. Can I be of any use to you?"

Crawford stirred uneasily. "I don't know," he said, in a husky voice. "I hope to God you can! If anyone can, it's you."

Stephen Endicott was a trifle surprised, a trifle moved, and he was not often moved or often surprised. He paused a moment before he spoke.

"Do you want my professional help?" he asked.

"I'll tell you the whole thing," said Crawford, with curious vehemence. "I don't know whether any human being can do anything at all; but if any man can, you are the man. I've heard and

read enough about you to know that. Besides, I remember a talk we had together—the last time I saw you——”

“It is your wife, then,” said the doctor quietly.

“Yes, confound you,”—he would have used a stronger word but for the steady look in Endicott’s eye,—“you told me then that she was delicate, and that she required care——”

“And you have not given her that care?”

“I’ve done my best. Before Heaven, I swear I’ve done my best. I took her abroad every winter; I gave her everything she wanted. I did my best to make her happy. And she was happy. I’ll stake my life on it. She loved me and I loved her, God knows; and then there was the child to brighten her life, even if I didn’t satisfy her——”

He broke off suddenly and bowed his head on his hands, planting his elbows on both knees, and letting his extinct cigar fall unheeded to the ground. Endicott looked at him keenly, and waited, without speaking, for a little while. The man’s heavy breathing could be heard very distinctly in the quiet room.

“Do you mean to say that you have not satisfied her, then?” the physician asked.

Crawford writhed as if he had been stung. “I love her; you know that,”

he growled. Then, in a more passionate voice: "It was not my fault if we lost money, and she was worried and anxious over business matters. How could I help that? I did everything for the best, as far as I knew; I had no idea that she was too delicate—too finely strung—to bear the ordinary trials of life. But that is what the doctor tells me now; that I've let her exert herself and bother herself too much, and that she has no strength left, and—and all the rest of it."

"If there is no definite disease——" the doctor began cautiously, but Crawford interrupted him.

"There is definite disease. That is why I have come to you. They say it is cancer."

A pause followed. Crawford had covered his eyes with one hand. The doctor drew in his lips. Then he put a few professional questions, quickly uttered, and as quickly answered, and succeeded by another silence.

"It seems to me," said Endicott at last, with bent brows and closed eyes, "that you are not telling me everything, Crawford. Was there no exciting cause? You say that the complaint has never appeared in the family before, and yet——"

"There was an exciting cause," said Crawford sullenly. "She was hurt by me. I did not mean to hurt her, but

I pushed her roughly aside once—I had had some heavy losses on the turf, and I suppose something I had taken had got into my head. She spoke to me and I flung her off; she fell up against a sharp piece of furniture and bruised herself; that was how it began.”

Dr. Endicott showed no emotion. Crawford felt, with a sudden reaction of feeling, that he would have liked his old friend better if he had expressed indignation or disgust. He only said meditatively:

“I fancied that there must be some such proximate cause. Of course, where there is no predisposition to the disease, a blow or a bruise would not develop it. I have had a case of the same kind, where a drunken husband——”

“Good Heaven!” shouted Crawford, springing up, “do you class me with your drunken husbands? Do you think I am in the habit of—of—of——”

He could not finish his sentence, but stood quivering with rage and shame. Stephen Endicott looked at him in his cold, steady way, but a gentler tone came into his voice as he replied:

“Forgive me, Harry: I had forgotten—I was thinking of the matter purely from a medical point of view. Of course I know, I understand, that you love your wife.”

“I would give my soul for her—my life for hers,” broke forth the man. “I

would never have lifted my hand, if I had known—if I had realized what I was doing. And now, they say, she must die for it, and I—I have killed her.”

He dropped his face into his hands and sobbed aloud—with the hard, tearing, difficult sobs which only come from a strong man in agony of pain. Stephen Endicott regarded him for a few moments with the cold, dispassionate gaze of one far removed from such exhibitions of emotional weakness ; but by slow degrees a kindlier gleam came into his gray eyes, and finally he rose and laid one hand upon Crawford’s shoulder.

“There may be hope yet,” he said. “Don’t despair, old man ; don’t give way. I will do what I can.”

“If she can be saved,” cried Crawford brokenly, “God knows how grateful I shall be.”

“I will do my best,” the doctor answered. “Pull yourself together, man ; while there is life, there is hope. I must see your wife as soon as possible ; and when I have seen her, I will give you my opinion.”

“When will you see her ? Will you come back with me—to-night ?”

“Not to-night—it is too late. Besides, I have other patients. No,”—after a moment’s deliberation,—“I cannot leave town until to-morrow afternoon. It will be Saturday—I will spend Sunday with you, if you like.”

CHAPTER III.

HARRY CRAWFORD'S WIFE.

MR. CRAWFORD slept at his friend's house, and departed early next morning, leaving Stephen to follow later in the day. He was much more cheerful by daylight than he had been in Dr. Endicott's study when telling the story of his need, but the doctor was not well pleased with his appearance. There was an air of self-indulgence, a want of self-restraint about the man, which suggested only too clearly the course of a reckless and jovial life; the first promise of his youth had died away, blighted by license and extravagance. He was good at heart, full of noble impulses which came to nothing, and which made him therefore appear worse than craftier men; open, honest, violent, fond of company, excitement, and good living; and unlikely, as Endicott said to himself while looking at his florid face and bloodshot eyes—unlikely to attain even the ordinary limits of man's age, the appointed threescore years and ten.

"You'll come as soon as you can get away, Stephen?" said Crawford anxiously. "If you telegraph, I'll send the carriage to the station. We still keep a trap or two, although we are on the

verge of ruin, you know. I feel every confidence in you. If you can cure Lilian——”

“Until I have seen her I can give no opinion, one way or the other,” said Dr. Endicott, with impatience. “I shall be very happy to do what I can; but you tell me you have had men like Harvey and Winter already, and that they give small hope—so what can you expect me to do?”

“But—but it is your special subject—you have a specific,” stammered Crawford, with such blank dismay in his face that the doctor would have laughed aloud had the occasion been less serious.

“I have no specific,” he said, “but I have a theory, which is not held, and indeed not understood, by any doctor in Europe save myself. It can only be tried in certain cases, and, I believe, at certain stages of the malady. Let us say no more about it at present, Crawford; for until I have myself seen and examined your wife I can give you no reason for hoping that my verdict may differ from that of men like Winter and Alick Harvey.”

“Ah, you don't want to raise my hopes too high, but I believe in you in spite of yourself,” said Crawford, with a sanguine insistence on his own view which distinctly irritated Stephen Endicott. “I have heard wonderful stories

of your skill. We may expect you to-night?"

"Certainly."

"It will be a little change for you. I am not sorry to force you away from this hothouse for a night or two. London suffocates me. I wonder that you can endure it. And your child, too! Stephen, can't you bring her down with you till Monday? Lilian adores children; she would be delighted to see your little one."

"I could not think of it," said Dr. Endicott hastily. "On such short notice, with no invitation from your wife, and to a house where there is sickness? You are too hospitable, my dear Harry. Besides, the child is quite well, and would only be unsettled by a change."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Crawford. "How could she be unsettled by a day in the country? The house is big enough to hold a dozen children, and there is the garden for her to play in. My own boy is at home, and his nursery arrangements are still in existence, with old Mrs. Abel at their head. Don't you remember old Abel, and how she tyrannized over me in my youth? She worships Harold by way of a change, and your little sprite would be quite safe in her charge."

"I know that," said Stephen, with a reluctant smile. "But I think it would

be better not, thank you. It is very kind of you, but——”

“Put it to her little ladyship herself,” said Crawford, who had caught sight of a small white figure in the hall. He strode to the half-open door of the dining room, where he and his host had breakfasted, and called to her: “Come here, little one, and decide this knotty point for yourself.”

Endicott frowned and shrugged his shoulders, but did not interfere. Perhaps in the face of Crawford's impulsive action he felt interference impossible. He leaned back in his chair and listened, while the red-faced, bluff, and genial country squire, who had been his boyhood's friend, addressed himself to his little daughter.

“Now, my dear, tell me what you would like. Will you come with your father this afternoon to see me? I live in the country, where there are trees and flowers and fruit, you know, and all sorts of nice things, and a little boy for you to play with, and a pony and dog and cat——”

“Oh, come, Crawford, that isn't fair,” said Endicott, with a slight smile. “You are piling up attractions to an irresistible extent. My wishes will have no effect after your words.”

“You would like to come, would you not, little fairy?” said Crawford, smiling also.

The child looked from one to the other, with the wistful gravity of expression which sometimes characterized her sweet little face. She must have understood more of their conversation than they had expected, for she said at last, with an appealing glance toward her father :

“Don't you want me to go, papa?”

“How did the monkey find that out, I wonder?” muttered Crawford, in the depths of his brown beard; but Dr. Endicott smiled and stretched a hand toward his little girl.

“Would you not rather stay at home with Miss Moore, Alice? She will be quite lonely without you.”

“Will she?” said Alice wistfully. “Don't you think she would like to go and see her friends, papa? I should like to go where the flowers grow, and have someone to play with.”

“You are conquered, Stephen,” said his friend. “Let her come; she will be no trouble, and we will make her enjoy herself. Lilian will be delighted.”

Endicott yielded, rather against his will. The old strain of independence was strong in him, and he had a little jealous fear lest his child should be patronized as he himself had been patronized in his youth. He would rather have kept her away from Bourneby, where his origin was remembered and his father's shop could still be

pointed out. But Crawford had put his invitation in a way that could not easily be refused.

He was accompanied on his journey, therefore, by little Alice, who sat bolt upright in the railway carriage, and gazed at the fleeting landscape which they traversed with ecstatic eyes. She was a quiet child, but capable of keen enjoyment. Her father looked at her now and then with half a smile and half a sigh. The very intensity with which, child as she was, she suffered and enjoyed, sometimes roused in him a fear for her future happiness.

He was surprised to find himself so quick to recognize the roadside stations, the very outlines of the trees, the distant spires of the churches. There was one old church for which Bourneby was especially famous ; it had a great tower, which stood up like a beacon and could be seen for miles around ; he had no idea that his heart would beat like a sledge-hammer when he caught sight of it again. He called to little Alice to look at it—and she gazed silently, glancing at his face now and then, with a comprehension beyond her years. Then she put up her hand and laid it against his cheek.

“ You are fond of it, papa ! Why didn't you bring me here before ? ” she said.

Dr. Endicott put his arms round her,

and held her close to him, but he went on looking out of the window in silence. There were many thoughts busy in his brain. Among others a sudden fear for the welfare of this woman-child of his, who was already beginning to partake of the troubles of others and to divine by unerring instinct the feeling of those she loved. It was a bad sign in his eyes ; for it meant that she was a sensitive plant, one of those delicate and tender souls whom a rough word and a cold look will blight and desolate. Even the most fortunate life in the world could, perhaps, not insure her perfect happiness. Whence had she stolen such a nature? For he knew that her mother had not been made of this rare substance ; and he scarcely realized the fact that little Alice, the lovely child with the golden hair, had inherited his own keen intellect, his quick perception, and, superadded to these qualities, a loving heart.

Mr. Crawford had sent a carriage to meet his friend, and Endicott was glad of it for Alice's sake. The drive through the soft balmy air, the gathering darkness and stillness, made the little girl sleepy. She was scarcely to be roused when the Hall was reached, and could only be handed over to the care of a rosy-cheeked maid and a buxom old woman in a white cap, to be put to bed as soon as possible. Mrs. Crawford

was, of course, not visible, and Endicott therefore saw only Harry Crawford and his little boy Harold. The two men sat up talking late into the night, but medical matters were not discussed; by common consent the friends ignored them and talked on art, politics, literature—anything which had no possible bearing upon the science of healing.

Stephen Endicott had long ago renounced the pleasures of country life, but he was by no means insensible to them, and when he awoke on Sunday morning to hear the church-bells ringing, and to feel the scent of the roses and the cool breath of the summer wind coming in at the open window, he felt a sensation of exquisite delight. He drew a long breath as he rose and looked out at the greenery of the park, the brilliance of the flower garden, the misty blueness of the distant hills. "A man might be very happy in a place like this," he said to himself. It seemed almost a pity that so fair a demesne belonged to a man like Crawford, with his sporting tastes, his low aims, his slightly brutal tendencies. Endicott wondered, half contemptuously, whether his wife had grown like him.

He did not see her until noon. The children had gone to church with the nurse; Crawford had been invisible ever since his after-breakfast smoke, and Endicott had lounged dreamily about

the velvet sward of the lawn, reading a medical journal underneath the trees. At twelve he was summoned to the house and shown into Mrs. Crawford's boudoir, a cool, pleasant room, opening by glass doors into a garden, shaded by silken draperies and odorous with flowers. Masses of cut roses and lilies filled the old Indian china bowl; the air was heavy with the fragrance and the sounds of rustling leaves, and the song of the birds floated in through the windows upon a gentle breeze. Here Mrs. Crawford spent a portion of the day, when she was well enough to leave her own room; and here she reclined in a long low chair, her fragile form supported by cushions, and draped in softest silks and laces—a lovely woman still, in spite of the traces of weakness and disease.

Stephen Endicott started at the sight. He had seen her when she was a delicate girl, under his medical care; he had caught passing glimpses of her when she had recovered her health and was engaged to Harry Crawford; but either her beauty had not then been fully developed, or his eyes were holden and he could not see. Now—now that he was not preoccupied by ambition and bereavement, and anxiety—now that he had mixed freely in society, and knew what beauty and refinement really meant, he was fain to acknowledge to himself, with rather a vexed amazement, that

Crawford had won for his wife a woman of the rarest loveliness. Part of this loveliness might possibly be the effect of disease, but it had not a painful character, chiefly on account of the extreme sweetness of her expression and the absence of anything like mournfulness. The blue veins showed too plainly upon her forehead, but they were partly hidden by softly waving strands of golden hair; her violet eyes were hollowed by pain and sickness, but they were still bright and beautifully shaped, with long silken lashes, much darker than her hair. Her cheeks, although thin, had not lost their color, and, languid and weak as she was, her manner was full of grace and charm. She gave the doctor her hand, and smiled with, it seemed to him, an almost terrible sweetness. What was the woman made of, he asked himself, who could confront disease and death with so undisturbed a countenance?

The question was beyond him, but he read its answer afterward in her readiness to save her husband from remorse, and to lighten his sorrow by the concealment of her own sufferings.

"It is very kind of you to come and see me, Dr. Endicott," she said. "I know how busy you must be. But Harry is so good, so anxious about me! and he has such entire confidence in you."

Dr. Endicott bowed and murmured

some acknowledgment of the complimentary speech.

"And I am so glad that you have brought your little girl. I saw her in the garden from my window, and I longed to speak to her. By and by she will come in with Harold and pay me a little visit, I hope."

"I can only trust that she is not in the way," said the doctor. "Your husband is, as you perhaps know, a very old friend of mine, and I could not resist his invitation. Alice does not often get the chance of a day in the country."

"She must stay for more than a day," said Mrs. Crawford. Then she leaned back, and looked for a moment at her husband, who was standing beside her chair. "Leave me with Dr. Endicott for a little while, Harry," she said softly. "I want to talk to him."

Mr. Crawford cast a glance at the doctor. "Must I go?" he asked helplessly. "Can't I stay. I am so anxious——"

"I will come to you as soon as I have had a little talk with Mrs. Crawford," said Stephen reassuringly; "but you had better go just now."

He yielded, though with a look of misery that went to his wife's heart, for she called him toward her and drew him down to kiss her lips before he went away. The loving smile, the exquisite sweetness, lingered upon her face until

he had left the room. But then it vanished suddenly, and the eyes that she turned upon Dr. Endicott were shining and cold as steel, the gracious lips were set close in an expression of stern resolve.

"Now, doctor," she said, "tell me the worst."

Harry Crawford walked up and down the terrace in front of the drawing-room windows until he was tired. He paused more than once at the side door which led to his wife's rooms, wondering whether he might not penetrate to her side and hear the doctor's verdict. But again and again he drew back. He was not a man of very fine fiber or very delicate perception, but he knew better than to return when his wife had told him to stop away.

It seemed an eternity to him before Endicott appeared. The doctor came with a quick step through one of the drawing-room windows, and looked about him with the air of a person seeking for another. With a half articulate cry Crawford came up to him, and put his hand upon his arm.

"Ah, there you are!" said Stephen. "I was looking for you. I have something to say."

"Tell me—quick; don't beat about the bush. Will she die?"

"How on earth can I tell? Is that in my hands?"

"Yes, it is. Don't trifle with me, Stephen. For God's sake save her, if you can. Is it life or death? Yes or no!"

Stephen looked at him for a moment with an indescribable expression, as of a man brought face to face with something which he did not understand. In truth Harry Crawford's nature was a puzzle to him. Here was a man, he would have said, who had selfishly, recklessly thrown away his fortune and his happiness, who could not even restrain himself from physical violence toward the woman that he loved, and was nevertheless agitated beyond concealment, driven almost to the verge of despair, because this woman was attacked with a possibly mortal sickness. The two states of mind were perfectly compatible, but they did not seem so to the more composed and stable-minded Stephen Endicott. He had a certain contempt for the man who attempted thus to war with fate. It was not for the sake of Harry Crawford, or of his old friendship, that he was willing to do what he could for Lilian Crawford's life.

"I cannot answer your question by a mere yes or no," he said, rather coldly. "I have several things to say. To begin with—it may relieve your mind to hear that I do not think so badly of Mrs. Crawford as the other doctors do."

"Thank God! thank God!" The

strong man trembled like a leaf. He put his hand over his eyes and turned his head away. Endicott paused a little, in order to give him time to recover himself, and then went on remorselessly :

“I agree with them as to the nature of the disease, but I do not think that it has made as much progress as they seem to think. It is like this, you see——” And then Dr. Endicott entered upon details of a technical kind, to which Harry Crawford listened with a slightly bewildered expression upon his honest face.

“Yes,” he said at length. “But the question is, if you have found out the mischief, can you remedy it?”

Dr. Endicott paused again. “That is a grave question,” he said. “But if you ask me, and if you will trust her entirely to my hands, Crawford, I believe I can.”

His hand was seized and wrung as perhaps it had never been wrung before. “God bless you ! I shall never be able to tell you what I feel, Stephen. You will save me from utter despair. If she had died, I felt as if—as if I must die, too.”

“Nonsense,” said Stephen, not unkindly. “You are growing morbid about the matter. I think I can save your wife, or at least prolong her life for many years ; but it does not do to be too sanguine ; yet I have good hopes, if I may try my own treatment.”

"Try anything! I have perfect faith in you."

"You must remember, Harry, that it will be something of an experiment. I have never before had the chance of treating the ailment at this stage according to my own theory. I may fail. But if I try at all, I must have your word that you trust her entirely to me, and will allow my instructions to be carried out to the letter."

"I trust you entirely, and you may treat her as you please. The other fellows have given her up; you are the only doctor that gives a ray of hope. I thought you would."

"Very well," said Dr. Endicott, after a moment's pause. "I accept the case. It will want great care, great watchfulness. Either she must come to London, or——"

"London! That oven! It would kill her."

"Or I," said Endicott coolly, "must come here."

Harry Crawford stared at him without speaking.

"I was going to Switzerland for a month," pursued the doctor, "but if you can put me up, I'll stay here instead. With a month's care and watching, I shall be able to tell how the case is likely to go."

"Endicott, I can never thank you enough, but it's impossible; I—I——"

He stopped embarrassed ; the color spread from his ruddy cheeks to the roots of his light hair. "Your fees"—he managed at last to stammer out, as an explanation of his opposition to the doctor's plan.

Endicott raised his eyebrows. "Fees ! Don't be a fool, Harry ! Of course, I shall treat Mrs. Crawford for the sake of the interest I take in her case, and for nothing else. Say no more about it ; the thing's arranged."

CHAPTER IV.

DR. ENDICOTT'S SUCCESS.

HARRY CRAWFORD was not altogether disposed to accept his friend's offer of service as readily as Dr. Endicott desired. Indeed, he made more objections than Stephen liked, and the physician at last turned crusty in manner, and insinuated somewhat sourly that Crawford did not care whether his wife was cured or not. This remark brought Mr. Crawford to his bearings, and he was obliged to submit to the sacrifice of Stephen's autumn holiday, out of sheer shame at seeming to have undervalued the help that he could bring.

Mrs. Crawford, too, was quite amazed

and horrified at the proposal. "Give up all his practice, and his holiday, and everything, in order to doctor me!" she exclaimed, with a wondering smile. "Really, Harry, I am not worth the trouble."

"You are worth any trouble in the world, my love," said her husband fondly. Then, after a moment's pause, "I think Endicott has a theory that he wants to work out—I believe it will please him more to stay here and attend you than go away for a holiday."

"That is a comfortable way of looking at it, at any rate," said his wife, with a suspicion of irony in her smile. "Well, we will make him as comfortable as we can; he will stay here, of course, and the little girl, too."

But Endicott refused to stay with the Crawfords. In the course of a walk taken that Sunday afternoon, he discovered a furnished house "to let" for August and September, and it occurred to him that it would be a more desirable thing to take this house than to stay at the Hall with the Crawfords. He disliked visiting, he wanted to be independent; and besides, this furnished house—usually known as the Manor House—possessed among other conveniences a long, high room, built on to one end of the house, and originally meant as a gymnasium, which would do excellently for laboratory or surgery or whatever in

that way he might need. This room was the greatest attraction which the house possessed for Stephen Endicott, although in several other respects he acknowledged that it was charming. There was a delightful garden, and some airy, well-lighted rooms for little Alice and her governess or nurse. The house was only half a mile from the Hall, and stood quite away from the village of Fenby, which was two miles from the bigger market town of Bourneby. The village lay in a hollow, and the Manor House was on an eminence behind it. The Manor House garden and the Crawfords' park were divided by a narrow lane which led from the village in the hollow to the church and churchyard on the hill. It seemed sometimes to strangers as if the church had been built chiefly for the use of the Hall and the Manor House, and that the spiritual welfare of the villagers had been the last consideration. The owner of the Manor House had gone abroad for the purposes of sport, and was not likely to return home for some months ; he had almost given up the idea of letting his house, but would (his agent assured Dr. Endicott) be delighted to obtain a tenant. Therefore, when the Crawfords expressed their desire that he would remain with them, the doctor took them by surprise by declaring calmly that he would by no means inflict himself upon their hospi-

tality, and that he had already made an offer for the Manor House.

Harry was disposed to be angry, but his wife, with keener comprehension of Stephen Endicott's disposition, soothed him into tranquillity. "Dr. Endicott will want to read and study," she said. "And it will be a greater change for him to come up now and then than to stay here altogether. Besides we are very happy in each other's society, are we not, Harry, dear?"

She held out her blue-veined, delicate hand to him, and he kissed it devotedly.

"You are right, as you always are," he said. "Yes, no doubt Endicott would be a bit of a bore, if he stayed in the house. And the child would be a nuisance, I dare say."

Lilian did not agree with him, but she did not care to say so. She herself would not have disliked having the doctor in the house; she was interested in him and enjoyed his conversation; but she saw quite well that her husband and he would not prove congenial companions, and she felt herself unequal to the task of reconciling their differences and making talk for the two.

Dr. Endicott took very little heed of the effect which his decision produced. He went back to London on the Tuesday, taking his child with him; but at the end of the week he was back again to take possession of the Manor House.

Nurse and governess came with him, for Alice's benefit, and in a very short time he seemed as much settled there as if he had owned the place all his life.

Whether the elders were satisfied or not, the children were in the seventh heaven of delight. Harold was a bright, intelligent little lad, with more of his mother's sweetness and refinement than his father's brusquerie. He was enchanted with his new companion, and was quite disposed to revere her and not in the least to look down on her for being a girl, as is often the custom with boys of his age. "Ay, he's been well brought up," Dr. Endicott said once, in a tone of approval, when the fact was brought to his notice; and he gave credit to Mrs. Crawford, for he was quite certain in his own heart, in spite of old acquaintance' sake, that Harry Crawford had not taught his son anything that was good.

Alice was disposed to fall down and worship at the feet of Mrs. Crawford and Harold, too. She had led a secluded little life, and had scarcely ever spoken to a boy or to a motherly woman before; so it was scarcely to be wondered at that she should think Mrs. Crawford and her boy absolutely admirable and charming. She lived quite as much at the Hall as at the Manor House, and when she was not at the Crawfords' Harold was with her. The parents looked on amused,

but Lilian one day hazarded a conjecture as to Alice's future which did not meet with her husband's approval.

"Marry Harold! What an absurd idea! Quite impossible!"

"Why, dear"? asked his wife placidly.

"Don't you see what a difference in station there is? Think of Endicott's father and the chemist's shop."

"Would that matter so very much?" said Mrs. Crawford, in a rather wistful tone. "I have heard that Dr. Endicott is on his way to be a wealthy man. He is very well off now, I believe."

"Money is not everything," said Harry Crawford. "I like old Stephen immensely—always did, when he was as poor as Job, too; but I don't want my boy to marry his girl, any more than I should have wanted my sister, if I had had one, to marry him. There's a difference."

"But you like Dr. Endicott so much!" said Lilian, to whose gentle spirit these words of worldly wisdom were not very acceptable.

"Of course I do—like him more than any man I know. And I trust him, too, Lily. I've made him executor of my will and guardian to Harold," said Crawford, with a laugh, "in case anything happens to me; and I don't see how I can show greater liking or greater trust than by doing that. But, by Jove,

I think I had better put in a new clause, that he's not to let my son marry his daughter ! ”

“ He would refuse to act, I should think, if you insulted him in that way. Not that anyone will be wanted to act, I hope. You are well and strong, Harry ; not like me. You will see Harold grown up and settled in life——”

“ And so will you,” said Harry stoutly. “ I'm sure Endicott is doing you good already. You look ever so much better than when he came.”

“ Do I ? Well, perhaps so ; I have thought so myself,” said Mrs. Crawford hesitatingly.

“ You feel better, do you not ? ” asked her husband. “ You are a little stronger, are you not, darling ? ”

She laid her hand in his, and looked at him with a wonderful brightness in her soft eyes. “ I am half afraid to say it,” she breathed, “ but I—I really think I am.”

And the thought grew to a conviction. She was better, she was stronger, she was gaining appetite and flesh, she slept well at night, and the weakness, from which she had suffered more than from actual pain, was certainly diminishing. Harry Crawford grew jubilant, and his wife ceased to check him in the expression of his joy. Yes, she was most assuredly better, and perhaps—perhaps

—she was going some day to be quite well.

She dared not ask Dr. Endicott the question. She saw the care and pains that he bestowed upon her case ; in every word he uttered or remedy he advised she felt his ability ; but she knew that he was anxious, and she would not trouble him with her own anxiety. Only, of late, she also saw and felt that his tones were more assured, that the shadow on his brow was lifting ; and he smiled upon her so pleasantly, when some little plan for the following summer was mooted, that she could not but believe that he was satisfied with the progress which she made.

Lilian was glad. She had been resigned to die, for she was a woman of profound faith, and knew that nothing could happen to her without the will and consent of God ; but she was glad to think that it was not God's will that she should die. She wanted to stay with her husband, to see her son grow up ; to avert, if possible, that ruin of their fortunes which sometimes seemed so near. Life, still fair and full of interest to her, she did not wish to leave it while she was young and had work to do. She longed with all her heart to hear the doctor say the words which would show that his remedies had proved effectual, although her case had been pronounced hopeless by every

other medical man who had attended her.

But Stephen Endicott was cautious. Cure, if cure were possible, would be the work of months, and he did not want to utter a premature word. As the autumn weeks passed on, however, he began to feel almost a certainty of success. And success in this case would to him mean triumph. It would mean that a certain theory of his was proved accurate, and that a cure had been found for a terrible disease. Lilian Crawford's case was a typical one. If she could be saved, there was safety also in the future for hundreds of other women. Stephen Endicott had always longed to make a discovery of this kind ; a discovery that would be of real benefit to the world, not only to himself. Success just now would probably mean fame and wealth and popularity ; but these things scarcely affected him. The lessening of pain, sorrow, and disease seemed to him the chief thing in the world, and for this end he said to himself that he was prepared to sacrifice his life—his very soul.

But until he was certain he would not speak. The holiday weeks passed over, and he was obliged to go back to town—for part of the week at any rate ; but he kept on the Manor House, and left his little girl and her governess behind. This gave him an excuse for running up

to Bourneby very often, and for seeing Mrs. Crawford two or three times a week. He saw that she seemed to grow better every time he saw her. But it was not until after Christmas, not until January and February had passed, and the spring flowers were showing their heads above the moist brown soil, that he uttered a reassuring word.

"I think I am justified in telling you," he said to Harry Crawford, in his most deliberate tones, "that the progress of the disease has been checked—indeed, I believe that the disease is not only arrested but is being cured."

"You think she will recover altogether?"

"I think so. In fact I am almost certain of it."

"Oh, God bless you, doctor!" said Harry. He wrung Stephen's hand, then turned away and sobbed openly, as only a man of his temperament could have done. Stephen looked at him with a sense of uncomprehending envy. He could not understand a man whose emotions lay upon the surface in this way.

However, although he could not understand, he was very kind to Harry. He spoke some cheering words, and seemed pleased with his friend's gratitude. The thought of his own success was dearer to him than the actual fact of Lilian Crawford's recovery; but he

was glad also to know that she would one day be well and strong again. And when she herself met him, later in the day, and held out her hands to him with radiant, smiling joy, he was almost touched by her gladness.

"We can never thank you enough for your kindness," she said.

He wanted to stammer out that it had not been "kindness," but simply devotion to a scientific theory, but he could not get out the words. He was taken aback by the light in her lovely eyes, the smile upon her lips.

"I did feel it hard to have to go away so early," she said simply. "And I am so thankful that I need not say good-bye to my husband and my boy just yet. And, under God, I owe my life to you, Dr. Endicott. But for your care and your wonderful skill, I should not be looking forward now to years of life and health, such as you say may be mine——"

"If you are careful, Mrs. Crawford. Of course you must keep up your strength and not excite yourself in any way. You must be in the fresh air as much as possible,—get your husband to take you for drives,—go abroad next winter, and so on. And if you take care I think you may count, as you say, upon years of life and health to come."

He was obliged to speak with curious dryness and precision, because he wanted

to hide the fact that he was moved to unusual emotion by her sweet thankfulness. Lilian Crawford, who understood him better than her husband did, was not deceived, however, by his manner. She knew instinctively that he was glad of her recovery, and that her friendship meant something to him. Again she held out her hand.

"I cannot tell you all I feel," she said. "But you must let me express my gratitude in deeds, not words. Some day, perhaps, I may be of use to your little Alice, as she grows up. And, if so, you will let me be her friend; just as you would be a friend to Harold, I know, if he were in any need or difficulty."

"I would, indeed," he said earnestly. And she felt that it was something to have extracted these words from the silent and reticent man.

Stephen Endicott was undoubtedly more pleased, more triumphant than he had ever been in his life. He was even impelled to speak of his success to a man whom he trusted a good deal, although he did not like him much—his laboratory assistant, Martin Dale.

"You'll publish an account of the case, I suppose, sir?" said Dale respectfully.

Dale was "not a gentleman," as people said. He had been an errand boy once. Then Dr. Endicott had found him out and made a pupil of

him, finally a sort of assistant in his laboratory. Dale had a wonderful "knack" at dissection ; he was a most useful young man to the doctor, but he did not aspire to the medical profession, nor did Stephen dream of making him a doctor. He considered that Dale was at present the right man in the right place.

He was not a prepossessing person. He had a pale face, deeply pitted with smallpox scars ; his small dark eyes were deeply set under heavy brows ; his face wore an astute, almost cunning expression. He was long and lanky in frame, and stooped from the shoulders, but was possessed of much muscular strength, and his hands were wonderfully skillful. Endicott did not like Martin Dale very much, and suspected him of an undue fondness for certain Eastern drugs which are not to be taken with impunity ; but he found the young man exceedingly useful.

"Yes, I shall publish an account of it, of course ; suppressing names, if necessary. There is no doubt about the cure."

"Perhaps the gentleman will consent to the publication of names, if the matter be properly represented to him," said Dale.

"Perhaps so. We shall see. It ought to make a sensation." And Endicott smiled pleasurably. He was warm at heart with the prospect of success.

At that moment a knock came to the door. Dale opened it, and immediately afterward handed an orange-colored envelope to his master. He noticed that Dr. Endicott frowned and turned a little pale as he opened it. "Who wants me now?" he said in a vexed tone. But he thought of little Alice at the Manor House as he spoke.

He read—read twice—then flung down the paper with an odd, gasping sound, almost like a groan.

"I hope there's nothing wrong, sir," Dale ventured to say.

"Wrong, Dale? Everything's wrong. Read for yourself."

Martin Dale took up the telegram and read :

"Crawford to Stephen Endicott :

"Carriage accident ; my wife killed on the spot. Come, if you can."

"It is Mrs. Crawford," said Stephen, in answer to a questioning look from Dale. "The case I told you about ; the case I built upon to establish my theory. Poor Crawford ! I'm sorry—sorry for him ; I'm sorry for her. But my case, Dale, my case ! I cured her, but who will believe it when she is—dead?"

He was thoroughly unstrung ; otherwise, such self-revelation would have been impossible to him. He cared

more for his theory than for Lilian Crawford, after all. He sat down and shaded his eyes with his hand. Not until he was roused from meditation by Dale's jarring voice did he look up again.

"You'll make a *post-mortem*, I suppose, sir? You can establish your theory in that way," said Martin Dale.

CHAPTER V.

FAILURE.

STEPHEN ENDICOTT walked slowly up the drive that led to Bourneby Hall. He had just arrived from the station, and he had sent Martin Dale to the Manor House with his bag. Why he had brought Martin with him, he did not say, even to Martin himself—but the young man knew very well that it was because the doctor thought he might need a helper in the work he wanted to do.

His nature was a tenacious one. He had set his heart upon the discovery of a cure for the disease from which Lilian Crawford had been suffering, and he believed himself the possessor of a remedy. It was easy to tell himself that he might find another patient upon whom he could try the system which he

had pursued so successfully in Mrs. Crawford's case ; but he was unreasonably impatient of the time which would thus be lost. Lilian's had been, as was said before, a typical case ; and he had watched it with a minute care which he was not often able to bestow. Unless he could in some way verify the effects of his treatment, all this care would, from a technical point of view, be lost. But he was determined that it should not be lost, if only he could manage to make Harry Crawford see matters from the right point of view. And by the right point of view, Dr. Endicott meant, of course, his own.

He rang at the door of Bourneby Hall, noting the deathly stillness that seemed to have fallen over the house, the inexpressible sense of desolation that had assailed it. Generally the front door stood hospitably open, and there were sounds of children's voices to be heard, or a passing footstep, or joyous laughter and music. But to-day everything was silent ; and the old manservant who opened the door had his eyes red and swollen, and the darkened spaces of the house seemed to Endicott terribly oppressive. He was half ashamed of the errand on which he knew that, secretly, he had come. Condolence ? The husband's grief ? The destiny of the motherless boy ? These had been but slight considerations with

him. They had not brought Stephen Endicott to Bourneby Hall that night.

He was shown into the library, and here, in a few moments, Harry Crawford joined him. Stephen was startled out of his self-absorption by the sight of his friend. Grief and horror had made a wreck of him already. He could not speak to Endicott without bursting into tears, and some time elapsed before any connected account of the catastrophe could be obtained.

"You advised her to go for drives, you know," the squire said at last, almost resentfully, as if Stephen's advice had been in fault. "And I took her myself; thought I could drive her better than anyone, you know. And—yesterday afternoon—we'd had a capital drive, and I was bringing the grays back through Rutter Lane—you know the place, don't you?—when we met one of those —— steam-plows, and the animals reared—got unmanageable all in a minute, they did—plunged, knocked the carriage almost to bits—threw her straight out into the road. All the rest of us went out, too——"

"Were the children there?" asked Endicott, almost in a tone of horror.

"Yes, but they weren't hurt. I wasn't hurt either," said Crawford, with a groan. "If only I had been knocked on the head and put out of the way! She never moved or spoke again, Endicott.

She wasn't even able to say good-by. And just when we were in the first flush of hope—when she seemed so much better——”

“She was better. She was virtually cured,” said the doctor.

“Oh, it seems very hard ; it is very hard !” cried Harry Crawford, throwing up his hands with a passionate gesture. “It was fated, I suppose, that I should kill her, after all. I thought I'd done it when she was so ill ; then I breathed again when she got better, but now—now—now——”

He broke down again, and wept unrestrainedly, with strong, vehement sobs and broken ejaculations of honest, unregulated grief. Stephen murmured a word or two of well-meant consolation from time to time, but it was doubtful whether Crawford heard.

“You'd like to see her, wouldn't you ?” he said, when the passion had spent itself at length, and he could speak distinctly.

“Yes,” Stephen said, “I should like to see her.”

“There will have to be an inquest,” Crawford said mournfully. “It's fixed for to-morrow. Merely a formal thing, you know, but very—very painful.”

“Ah, yes, very,” said Dr. Endicott mechanically. For the moment, it seemed as though his thoughts were far away from the matter in hand, and

Crawford glanced at him in surprise and indignation. But the doctor looked so sad, so grave, so compassionate, that Harry Crawford's anger evaporated as quickly as it had arisen.

"Come this way," he said, and Stephen followed him to the room where all that was mortal of Lilian Crawford lay.

Everything had been done which could possibly disguise the ghastliness of death. The room was draped in white, and the marble-like figure was half covered with lovely white flowers. Endicott looked silently and gravely for a few minutes, then bent and looked at a purple mark on the temple. "It was this, I suppose?" he said, in a hushed voice.

"Yes. There was no other injury."

Endicott breathed more freely. In spite of the solemnity of the moment, in spite of the desecration, as it might be called, to which he purposed putting that fair, deserted temple of a beautiful soul, he was mutely glad that Lilian Crawford's body had not been crushed, and that there would be no physical obstacle to the examination he wished to make. He was not consciously ghoul-like, but his whole mind was fastened on one idea, and he had persuaded himself that this one idea was for the benefit of the whole human race. He stayed but a few minutes in the death-chamber, for he saw that Harry

was on the point of breaking down, and he thought it better to remove him before he again gave way.

"Just when she was growing stronger," the squire said mournfully, as they re-entered the library. "Just when she was cured of that trouble of hers—she was cured, I suppose, Stephen?"

It was the very opportunity that Stephen desired.

"I believe that she was cured," he said deliberately. "In a case like hers, a few months' more treatment would have shown us absolutely whether I had been successful or not."

"Ah!" said Harry, turning his dimmed eyes upon his friend, with only a half comprehension of his meaning. "But I thought you told me she was all right."

"I told you I believed so. I do believe so. In a few months I could have spoken with even a more absolute confidence—that is all."

"And now you can't know for certain. After all your care and attention that is a little hard, aint it?" said Harry, turning a feeble ray of intelligence upon the situation. "But it can't be helped now. It's—it's the will of Providence, I suppose."

"It is not," said Stephen more sternly than he knew. "I can still ascertain perfectly well whether she was cured or not."

Crawford stared at him fixedly, but had evidently no idea as to what he meant. And with gathering earnestness Dr. Endicott went on.

"I wish to call your attention to one very important point. Mrs. Crawford suffered from an internal disease—a growth probably of a cancerous nature, which has hitherto been deemed incurable. I speak to you as one outside the medical profession, and will therefore spare you any technical terms. It was impossible to cut the growth away, and no local treatment has been practicable. My own theory was that the growth could be done away with by the use of certain drugs ; and I have pursued this treatment with apparent success. The thing to be established is—whether the diseased growth has simply been dispersed, in which case I think traces of it would be discovered in other parts of the system, or whether it is gone altogether. You understand."

"Yes, I understand."

"If it is gone, my theory is proved. That is all."

He looked so entirely satisfied and interested in the anticipated success of his theory, that Harry Crawford, smarting from the sense of a terrible bereavement, for the moment lost his temper.

"—— your theory," he said bitterly.

Endicott was surprised. He paused, and then remonstrated.

“My dear Harry, you mistake my reasons for forcing these facts upon you. I know how vain and futile they may appear to you just now. But there are other people in the world to whom they are as important now as they were to you three months ago. There are other women suffering and dying from the same complaint—other husbands and children who are lamenting the loss of the wife and mother who was most dear. It is on their account I speak.”

Some glimmering of the doctor's meaning perhaps flashed across Harry Crawford's brain. He sat down and watched Endicott's face from under lowering brows; and he breathed heavily as he listened.

“I had an opportunity of observing the progress of the disease and of its cure in your wife's case, such as I shall probably never have again. I made valuable notes on every stage, and observations which I wrote out in the most minute detail. Little more remained to be done before I could give that result to the world. Death has unfortunately stepped in and robbed me of the conclusion to my researches. Your loss is my loss also—and the loss of the world.”

“Good Heaven!” said Crawford, clutching the arm of his chair, and looking fiercely at his friend, “and I thought you watched her from a feeling of regard—I thought you cared to cure her—

and you were only bent all the time on medical research. You meant to give her case to the world, did you? Hers! You forgot that you had me to reckon with, Dr. Endicott."

"It made me no less a friend to you and to her that I was bent on enriching the world with my discoveries," said Stephen quietly.

"Well, that may be. But Death has stepped in, as you say, to rob you, unfortunately, of your conclusion. Be thankful to Death for once! I would have taken you by the throat and strangled you sooner than that you should make a 'case' of her illness—a case to be quoted in the *Lancet* and the *British Medical* and all your other d—— medicine papers. I would kill you first!"

"My dear Harry, listen to me," said Stephen, with great gentleness. "I assure you that Mrs. Crawford's name would never have been mentioned. I should not have brought her personally into any discussion or controversy. And she would have been the last person to object to my giving to other people the benefit of the knowledge and experience I had gained in her case."

"Perhaps so," said Crawford, turning away with a sullen air. "And if she had consented, and liked the notion, that might have been a different thing. But it is too late to consider the matter now. Fortunately, perhaps, for you."

"Surely, you acknowledge the good that might be done if I could see my way to combating this terrible form of disease?" said Endicott. "Think of the women who might be saved; of the blessings that their husbands would give to the system that saved them; the good that it would do——"

"Why should I think of all that?" said Crawford roughly. "I have lost all I care for in the world, in spite of your science. It is not my business to save other men from the sorrow I bear."

Stephen knitted his brow. This frame of mind was quite incomprehensible to him. He had his faults, but he had not the particular kind of selfishness which was natural to Harry Crawford; for any sorrow that had ever come to him had, so far, served only as a spur to exertion for the good of his fellow-men. And to make it into an excuse for churlish refusal to help others was to him an almost unpardonable sin.

"It is my business," he said shortly, "to save people from bodily pain and illness, to the best of my ability. You ought to know that."

"I do know it. I am grateful for all you did for my poor Lilian. But I won't have her made into a case to be discussed and bandied about in every newspaper. Thank God! it's too late for that."

"Excuse me," said Stephen. "You

keep saying that it is 'too late' for this, that, and the other. You must allow me to remind you that it is not too late for my observations to be proved and concluded."

"What do you mean?"

"With your permission," said Dr. Endicott formally—but there was a note of menace in his voice, "with your permission, which in the interests of medical science I must request, an autopsy will put me in possession of all the facts that I wish to know."

"An aut—speak English, man: what do you mean?"

"I mean that I wish to make an examination of Mrs. Crawford's state at the time of her death. It shall be conducted quite privately, Harry; no one will know of it, and there need be nothing at all to hurt your feelings; but some slight examination would show——"

The squire started up with a roar like that of a wounded bull, and faced the doctor with flushed face, and angrily flashing eyes.

"You brute! Do you mean that you would cut up my -wife's body for the sake of your cursed investigation?"

Stephen Endicott did not flinch. "Cutting up is a figure of speech which we need not discuss," he said calmly. "I propose to make an examination——"

“You propose to use a knife in your examination? That is what I mean by cutting up,” said Crawford. “And I defy you to deny it if you can. Examination! You will not lay a finger on my wife’s dead body, Endicott, so long as I am alive to protect it. Is nothing sacred to you in the whole wide world?”

For the first time Stephen hesitated and looked down, then cleared his throat, and proceeded somewhat diffidently :

“Of course, if you have so strong a dislike to it, Crawford, I can say no more. I assure you, however, it is not at all an uncommon proceeding. In difficult cases, it is sometimes almost a necessity before a certificate as to the cause of death can be given.”

“It is not a necessity in this case,” said Crawford grimly. “There is not the slightest doubt about the cause of Lilian’s death.”

“Consider the interests of other sufferers—consider how I might alleviate their agonies, if I knew.”

“I don’t believe you could do more than you do already. Besides, your patients are nothing to me, in comparison to the love I feel for my dead wife. Do you think I am going to let her beautiful body be hacked about by a dissecting knife for the gratification of your curiosity? It is sacrilege to think of it.”

Dr. Endicott's eye flashed. He was goaded into uttering the bitterest word that he had ever said to Harry Crawford.

"You did not respect her beautiful body very much when you gave her the blow that developed this disease," he said. And almost before the words were out of his mouth, the squire's brawny hands were at his throat.

There was a moment's struggle, sharp but short. Then Endicott, having got the mastery of his opponent, laid him back in the big armchair and looked at the panting breast, the swollen veins, and inflamed countenance of the country squire with infinite contempt.

"Don't try that sort of thing too often," he said. "You can't stand it, and it is very bad for you. You are behaving like a fool. To my thinking there is nothing derogatory to man or woman in giving his or her body after death for purposes of science; and to refuse it in this case is to bring upon yourself the scorn of all sensible men."

"Get—out of—my—house!" gasped Crawford.

"Certainly. I am going at once, and will never cross its threshold again. Unless, indeed, you should retract what you have said——"

"You villain!" hissed forth the infuriated man. "Get out of my sight! To think that she—talked with you—liked you—treated you and your child

with kindness, and that you should repay us in this way ! ”

For answer, Endicott simply shrugged his shoulders. Crawford's attitude was almost incomprehensible to him. He had immersed himself so deeply in scientific modes of thought that an objection founded, as he would have said, entirely upon “sentiment,” did not seem to him to be worth consideration. He went out of the house, feeling a good deal wounded, and even more vexed than wounded at Crawford's words, and as he walked back to the Manor House he reflected within himself that it would be better to give up his dream of a country life for Alice, and transplant her with himself to London again ; for Fenby would be unbearable if Bourneby Hall were closed against them both.

Martin Dale met him at the garden gate, and walked, two paces behind, to the house door with him. Endicott had not meant to show his vexation, but in the first shock of disappointment it all came out. Perhaps a leading question, such as Martin Dale was in the habit of putting, was the immediate cause of this confidence. And Dale was almost too sympathetic.

“Such a loss to the world at large ! ” he moaned. “And the case has been talked about—written about. People will say she was killed by the remedies you've used ; that they got into her

system and poisoned her. It will be a great blow to your reputation, sir : dear, dear ; how unfortunate it is ! ”

“ I shall publish my notes on the case,” said Endicott, who did not quite like this way of looking at the matter, “ and they ought to be conclusive. You can corroborate them, you know.”

“ Yes, sir. But how much more satisfactory it would be to have a *post-mortem*. You need not have made that public at all, you see, but it would have enabled you to establish your conclusion. Perhaps it is not—too late—yet, sir ? ”

“ Nothing will alter Mr. Crawford’s decision, I’m afraid. He will not give his consent.”

“ Couldn’t it be managed without his consent, sir ? ”

“ Certainly not,” said Dr. Endicott angrily. “ What are you thinking of, Dale ? I could not do such a thing by underhand means, of course.”

“ Couldn’t you, sir ? ” said Martin Dale meekly. “ Oh, I beg your pardon. Only it does seem a pity to lose the chance, does it not ? You and I together, sir—I am sure we could manage it without letting anyone else into the secret.”

CHAPTER VI.

MARTIN DALE'S SUGGESTION.

“WHAT do you mean, Dale?” said Endicott unwillingly.

He knew that he ought not to have asked. He knew that he had better tell Martin Dale to hold his tongue, and make up his mind valiantly to bear what could not be helped. But he asked the question, heard Martin Dale's cautiously suggested answer, and replied with a hasty negative and a rebuke. But the suggestion had nevertheless been made, and lingered in Dr. Endicott's memory, as Dale perhaps had known that it would do. At any rate, he noticed that the doctor did not send him back to London immediately, but kept him until the following morning, as if undecided as to his own course of conduct. And on the following day, doctor and assistant returned to town together, but in a curious and almost unbroken silence.

Dr. Endicott returned to Fenby in time for Mrs. Crawford's funeral, but he did not go up to the Hall before or afterward—a fact which was a good deal commented on in the neighborhood. “Crawford can't blame him for his wife's death, surely,” said one man to another. “Shouldn't think so; why,

she was said to be getting so much better—probably he blew Crawford up for taking her out, and Crawford turned rusty—just his way.” “They used to be friends—dare say the little coolness will wear itself out before long,” was the answer; and the subject dropped and was forgotten until subsequent events recalled it to the speakers’ minds.

The funeral took place on a showery day in March: a day that was peculiarly dreary and depressing. There was a large concourse at the grave, and it was evident that Mrs. Crawford was very sincerely mourned by her friends and acquaintances. Dr. Endicott stood nearly opposite Harry Crawford, and was observed to watch him narrowly—possibly for medical reasons, as the strong man’s strength seemed to have vanished utterly, and he staggered more than once on the very verge of the grave, as if he would have fallen. Few were present who were not affected by the sight of his grief, the sound of his heart-rending sobs, as the coffin was lowered into the grave beneath the burden of white wreaths and floral crosses, but it made more impression on the mind of his little son Harold than on that of anyone else. The boy Harold never lost the memory of those terrible moments, and, at a much later period in his life, it recurred to him with almost overwhelming force.

Stephen Endicott returned gloomily and slowly to the Manor House, Martin Dale, who had also attended the funeral, following at a respectful distance. The doctor did not enter the house by the usual door. He went round to the back, where the gymnasium—now a laboratory and workroom—stretched its ugly length of wood and iron into the overgrown old garden. Here he opened the garden-door and entered, leaving it open for Martin, who slid in after him, as if half afraid of being seen.

The doctor stood in the middle of the bare room, and looked round him with a half stupefied air. Some difference of arrangement in the furniture struck him at once. A big table had been drawn forward, for one thing, and looked painfully large and bare. There were certain packages on the floor: some of them looked like tools, and were of curious shapes and sizes. Stephen Endicott looked at them with a frown on his brow. Then he glanced up at Martin Dale with an odd expression of mingled anger and perplexity.

"You have taken me at my word, then," he said.

"Yes, I have," said Martin Dale.

The doctor eyed the packages again.

"It will be an awkward business if we are discovered."

"How can we be discovered, sir?" said Martin smoothly. "It is a splen-

did night for the business, and the grave is in a very remote situation."

"You had better hold your tongue," said Dr. Endicott sharply. "The fewer spoken words the better."

"Deeds speak louder than words, don't they, sir?" said Martin, with an apparent innocence which made the doctor shrink a little in spite of himself. "And these little implements—I'd a deal of trouble to get them, sir, and you promised to pay the expenses, which were close on ten pounds altogether, and a trifle for remuneration——"

"We did not fix the sum, eh?" said the doctor, without looking at him. "Well, how much?"

Martin preferred to leave it to Dr. Endicott.

"Twenty pounds?"

"Considering the risk, sir, I think twenty pounds is—hardly——"

"Double it, then. Forty."

"And the expenses, sir. Fifty altogether."

Dr. Endicott hesitated. He was putting himself entirely in the power of this man. Was it worth while? A sharp struggle raged within him for a minute or two. Peace, honor, truth on the one side; success, gratified pride, perhaps the hope of bringing relief to the physical pain of some of his patients on the other. And the latter won the day.

"Very well," he said shortly. "I will give it you afterward."

"No, sir, you won't ; you'll give it me now," said Martin Dale.

It was the first touch of insolence he had allowed himself, and he quailed as soon as the words were out of his mouth, for Stephen Endicott turned upon him with a flash of the eye that nearly frightened the young man out of his wits.

"Be thankful if I give you anything instead of a sound drubbing for your impudence," said the doctor. "What do you mean by talking to me in that way, you insolent lout?"

Martin cringed and pleaded. He had not meant it ; he had not meant anything ; he was only too happy to execute the doctor's orders, and did not ask for any reward at all. So he said, but there was something in his eye that made Stephen Endicott uneasy ; something that he could not altogether understand.

"I have no objection," he said at length, rather slowly, "to divide the sum and give you half now, and half when we come home to-night. Will that satisfy you?"

Martin declared himself more than satisfied. He was even effusively grateful. Endicott turned away from an outpouring which seemed to his ears offensive, and walked silently into the house, telling the young man to await his return. He would not have been sur-

prised to see the change that came over Martin Dale's face when he had departed, if it had been possible for him to see it. He knew the world, he knew his man, too well to expect anything else. The assistant sneered at him behind his back, sneered with an expression of inconceivable hate and contempt.

"I have you now, Dr. Endicott," he said to himself; "I hold your reputation in the very palm of my hand; I have you now." And his face was lighted up with a perfectly fiendish joy.

Stephen Endicott went heavily along the passage of the house to his own room. He had guessed that money would be required that day, and he was prepared for the emergency. He unlocked a bureau and took thence a certain number of notes and sovereigns, which he placed in a small canvas bag which he thrust into his pocket. Then he walked slowly from the room, forgetting, however, that he had left the keys hanging in the lock of the bureau. He forgot them—until the morrow, when he had an unpleasant reminder of his own carelessness.

As he walked back to his laboratory, little Alice came out of her nursery and ran up to him, catching at the sleeve of his coat as he went by.

"Father!" she said, somewhat timidly. "Father! Is it really true?"

"Is what true, my darling?" said Endicott, stopping short, and stroking back her clustering curls of gold.

"Is it true what nurse says, father? Is Harold's mother really gone away? Gone to heaven, so that I shall never see her any more?"

"It is quite true, my little girl," said Dr. Endicott.

"Oh, father!"

The child's eyes were full of tears, which fell over her fair little face as she looked at him. He took her up in his arms and kissed her; for the moment he did not want her to look him in the face.

"Father, are you sorry, too?" she murmured.

"Yes, my child, yes. God knows I am sorry," he answered; and there was more in the sentence than Alice could comprehend.

"But you won't leave off being friends with Harold and his father, will you?" said the child, who had evidently heard some gossip on the subject—probably from the servants.

"Oh, that will be all right, my dear," said the father evasively. He wished that he had sent her back to London with her nurse and governess, before this day of the funeral. But it was too late now.

"Will it?" said the child. "Will Harold come and see us just the same?"

"Harold is growing a big boy. He will soon be going to school, and not care to play with girls," Stephen Endicott replied. "And you are my own little daughter. I shall want you a great deal more than I ever did before, now that you are growing so tall. You love me more than you love Harold, do you not?"

"Oh, yes," said Alice eagerly. "I love you, father, as much—as much"—she paused for an instant in order to find a suitable comparison—"as much as Harold loves his mother—and that's a great, great deal."

He kissed her again, but set her down rather hurriedly. Something in her words touched him—the thought, perhaps, of the boy's love toward the dead woman whose last resting place he had made up his mind to violate that night.

He strode back to the laboratory with his hand clasped over the bag of money in his pocket. He thought to himself that he would have renounced his project if he had not already spoken to Martin Dale. But there was a certain shrinking in his mind—a shrinking from the sneer that he could picture to himself upon the young man's face. He seemed to hear the jibe that would issue from Martin's lips. "I didn't think you would be afraid, sir!" he could fancy that he heard Martin say. And he could not face that jeer.

He found Martin busy with some mysterious preparations for the night's work—he could not ask him what they were. He simply walked up to him and thrust the bag into his assistant's hands. The young man nodded and smiled, but made no other reply. He saw that Dr. Endicott was ashamed of what he was going to do ; and his shame placed him all the more completely in Martin Dale's hands. He was not ashamed ; and he had, so far, an advantage over Dr. Endicott. But he was more afraid, and, so far, Dr. Endicott had the advantage over him.

The two men took pains to behave as usual. They dined together at the usual hour, ate as usual, conversed a little as usual. Alice came downstairs for dessert ; she did not dine with her father in the country. Tea was served in the drawing room, and at half-past ten Mr. Martin Dale retired demurely to his own room, and Dr. Endicott went round the house to perform the ceremony known as "locking up." At eleven all the lights were out save one in the library, where, as it was well known to the household, the master usually sat and read or wrote until the small hours of the morning.

He did sit there till midnight. He took some papers out of his desk and went steadily and undeviatingly through his notes of Mrs. Crawford's case. His

brow cleared as he perused them. They were so clear, so convincing; they wanted so little to be absolutely perfect, and that little he was about to supply. Surely there was nothing to be ashamed of here.

At midnight he roused himself from the study of his notes. He went softly to his bedroom and took from his box a suit of clothes which he had brought with him from London—rough, ill-made tweed clothes, with a dark ulster over all, and a soft felt hat, which could be bent down into any shape above his face. He looked at himself in a mirror, frowned, and involuntarily shook his head. The pale, clear-cut features that loomed forth from the surrounding shadows were far too marked to escape recognition, should he be met that night even by a casual acquaintance. With an expression of mingled disgust and impatience he took out of the box a false beard, dark and bushy, which, when affixed, completely changed his appearance. It would not be very easy to recognize Stephen Endicott, the London doctor, in that guise.

At the last moment he turned back and took his watch and chain from the table where it had been lying. "It will be as well to know how the time goes," he said to himself as he thrust it into an inner pocket, concealing the heavy seal that hung from the chain within his

waistcoat. "And now let me see whether Dale is ready. I wish I could have employed anyone else." And it was with a dark foreboding of evil upon him that he slunk, noiselessly as any burglar, down to the locked door of the laboratory.

The long, bare room was faintly lighted by a solitary candle, and Dale was busy at a table. He looked up, uttered a faint cry, and threw himself into an awkward attitude of defense. He had not recognized his master.

Endicott laughed slightly. "You fool!" he said. "Don't you know me? Then I am safe indeed."

"Oh! I beg pardon," said Dale, letting his hands sink to his sides. "I had no idea—if I'd thought of it, I would have done something of the sort," he added, looking enviously at the false beard, the felt hat, and the shabby, all-concealing ulster. "I never thought of a disguise."

"It does not matter to you," said the doctor carelessly. "You are not responsible: I am. You are merely acting under my orders. Come, there is no time to waste; let us get to work."

Martin sullenly obeyed. There were various implements to be collected; tools, a sack, a dark lantern, among others. These were divided between the two men, and then the candle was extinguished, the garden door opened, and the ill-assorted pair found them-

selves in the garden, with the cold night air throwing a dash of rain into their faces.

“A good night for our project,” was the thought of both men, but neither spoke. It was extremely dark, and a wild wind was souging among the branches of the trees, while a few rain-drops fell now and then from an angry sky. It was certainly not a night on which many persons were likely to be abroad. The inhabitants of Fenby kept early hours ; and the lane that led past the churchyard was not frequented after dark. Dr. Endicott led the way down the drive ; then he turned aside to a little wicket gate which opened into this very lane, and there he stopped short for a moment to listen and to look. It was a good spot for such observation ; it commanded in the daytime a good view of the village in the valley, and a glimpse of the Hall upon the hill.

There was nothing to excite remark. Not a light could be seen, either in the village or from the windows of the Hall. The moan of the wind, the creaking of the branches, the rustle of the long grass and the bracken, were the only sounds that broke the stillness of the night. After listening intently for a minute or two, Dr. Endicott turned abruptly to the left, and led the way up the lane to the churchyard gate, Martin following close behind.

The night was so dark that even the grayish white church tower glimmered but faintly through the blackness. The tombstones stood up like dimly outlined ghosts. Martin Dale, with a sudden superstitious thrill, wondered how the doctor could dare to go so boldly upon his unholy errand; and wondered still more at the swiftness and sureness with which he made his way to the freshly made grave, still heaped with flowers laid there that afternoon by loving hands.

It was plain that Dr. Endicott was not going to allow himself any sentiment on the subject. He did not pause a moment. He began by removing the wreaths one by one and laying them aside. They would be wanted later on. Then, with a word or two of direction to Martin, he began to dig up the earth, which was still loose and moist above Lilian Crawford's coffin. In this task he was assisted by the younger man, and when they had worked for some time, they ventured to light the lantern and turn it upon their toil. Neither of them spoke. The work was hard, and also, of necessity, very slow. Cold though the night had seemed, the beads of perspiration rolled down the faces of the diggers long before their task was achieved. But then they worked with a will, only pausing from time to time to be sure that no footsteps could be heard, that no watcher was drawing nigh.

At last the work was done—or almost done. The earth was all removed: the coffin was laid bare. And then, skillfully and gently, Stephen Endicott applied his tools to the lid; the screws were easy enough to manage, and the lid was not difficult to raise. He had just caught a glimpse of the white form which he was about to raise from its resting place, when a strange, sudden sound fell upon his ears. There was a stifled cry from Martin Dale, and the sound of rushing feet. Endicott leaped out of the grave in which he had been standing, and found himself almost in the arms of a formidable adversary.

“Who are you that come to rob my wife’s grave?” said a hoarse, furious voice. And for one moment Stephen Endicott felt a thrill of positive fear. For the voice was the voice of Harry Crawford, and he knew that this struggle would be for life or death.

CHAPTER VII.

AT LILIAN'S GRAVE.

ONCE already had Dr. Endicott proved himself superior in strength of muscle and sinew to his old friend. But in this case Crawford had some advantages, apart from physical fitness.

He had come upon an enemy who was unprepared, and he was in the right, whereas Endicott was in the wrong ; besides, anger gave force to his arm and weight to his blows. At first the advantages seemed to be all on his side. Stephen was a little unnerved, and defended himself without vigor ; and he was also confounded by the unexpected fact that Martin Dale, who had suggested and stimulated him to this expedition, had, on the first hint of danger, taken to his heels and run away.

But in the long run Dr. Endicott's strength and coolness returned ; and, as Crawford pressed him hard, he began to see that he must do something more than defend himself. The false beard was torn from its place ; and by the terrible look of rage and hatred which he could distinguish upon Harry's face, he knew that he was discovered. Crawford was almost too breathless to speak ; but he hissed out a word or two which stung Stephen Endicott like a whip. "Traitor ! scoundrel !" he exclaimed ; and in the stress of the moment Stephen could almost have fallen on his knees and confessed the truth of the epithets. But he did not do it. He ceased to defend himself ; he struck back—struck once, and struck heavily—and that one blow was all. Crawford sank backward, without a word, without a groan. His fingers were entangled in Endicott's

watch chain and dragged it from its place as he fell—the links snapping in his clenched hand.

He lay still. Endicott expected words of abuse, a groan perhaps, a movement. But no sound came. A little quiver seemed to pass through the man's prostrate frame as he lay upon the ground. Stephen stood over him with clenched hands and panting breast, waiting—waiting for him to struggle, to speak, to rise; but there was nothing save silence and stillness, which became at last horrible to the living, breathing, hotly excited man. His hands gradually sank to his sides; his breathing became quieter, his limbs lost their tension. He came a step nearer, and bent down. Nearer! nearer! he could not hear any sound: not even the sound of living breath. "Harry!" he said, in a half-whisper, using the old familiar name. "Harry!" But there was no reply.

The lantern still burned beside the grave. Endicott caught it up, and held it, with hands that trembled in spite of himself, to his old friend's face.

It was white, rigid, already settling into that profound peace which is never seen except upon the face of the dead. Endicott felt for the pulse; but nothing fluttered at his wrist. The man's spirit had departed, and only the lifeless clay remained behind.

Stephen Endicott took a long time to convince himself of the fact. He chafed the hands and temples, he tried to pour brandy down the stiffening throat, he called on his friend by name, in agonizing accents, to rouse himself and tell him that he was yet alive. And all the time he knew that his efforts were in vain. His own medical knowledge told him that he could not bring back the pulse to Harry Crawford's heart, the flow of blood through his veins, the strength to his arm ; these were gone forever, with the soul that had animated his body, and no prayers, no tears, no efforts could avail to bring them back. He was dead—the friend of Stephen's boyish days was dead, slain by a blow from Endicott's own hand—and Stephen was a murderer.

Small shame was it to him that, when the truth was borne in upon his mind, Stephen Endicott threw up his arms in wild appeal to Heaven, and then sobbed out a passion of grief upon his friend's dead breast. For he had loved Harry Crawford, and, in spite of all that had come between them, loved him still. He was not a man of quick affections, but, such as they were, they were strong. And in the darkness of the night, for a few brief, stormy minutes, he cried out : " Would to God that I had died for you, my brother, my friend, my friend ! "

The striking of the church clock

broke upon his ear, and recalled him to himself. One—two—three—three o'clock in the morning, and half his work not done! What should he do? A sudden sense of his terrible position came to him with such force that it almost overturned his brain. What if he were found by some laborer going to his work at dawn, by some local constable on his rounds, or by the verger of the church, between the corpses of husband and of wife—the one in her open coffin, with peaceful, smiling face upturned to the gloomy sky; the other, stark and rigid upon the wet grass, with blood on his clothes and marks of violence upon his body, to show how he had come to this untimely end? And he, Stephen Endicott, the grave-robber, the murderer, powerless and gibbering in hopeless idiocy between the two? This was the picture as it presented itself to the doctor's mind, and struck him for a few minutes to a paralysis of helplessness. He trembled from head to foot; he shivered with the sickness of such a horror as it is the lot of few human beings ever to know. Afterward he knew that his sanity had trembled in the balance, and that a man of weaker will and an intellect less clear and bold would have ended as a hopeless lunatic.

It was a thought of Alice which saved him. What would become of the child,

if her father were hanged as a murderer or confined in a lunatic asylum? For her sake he must command himself, and bend all thoughts toward the concealment of his crime. Then came the remembrance of his object in rifling the grave of its treasure. What about his discovery? his experiment? Was he to abandon it, and to abandon also the hope of a great success in life, the hope of bringing a new alleviation to human pain? No, he said to himself, that should not be. And thereupon there fell upon him a great fear lest the reward of his toil and travail should be lost to him after all, and lest the work of that night should be discovered to the world.

He sat up and looked about him in sudden panic. Where was Martin? Had he gone, the fool? Yes, he seemed to have disappeared, but fortunately he had left his implements behind him. The worst was that the work which Dr. Endicott was bent on doing would be far more arduous and difficult without help than if Martin had been there to lend a hand. "The dolt does not think that he will get that other twenty-five pounds after deserting me in this way, does he?" said the doctor angrily to himself.

He stood erect, steadied his nerves by swallowing some brandy, then set himself doggedly to work at the task that lay before him. He had to lift the

dead body of Lilian Crawford out of the coffin, and this was a piece of work which, under ordinary circumstances, he could not possibly have accomplished without help. But at that moment he was capable of anything. After almost superhuman efforts, the long white figure, in its grave-robes, lay upon the grass beside him, and he drew a long breath of relief, which was succeeded by a sharp gasp of agonizing fear. For surely, surely someone was coming up the lane which skirted the churchyard, and led from Fenby to the upper road.

He hastily extinguished the lantern, drew the coarse sack over the white figure, and crouched down in the long grass beside the murdered man.

The footsteps drew nearer and nearer. It was a heavy, deliberate tread, and Dr. Endicott believed that he recognized it as the tread of a heavy-footed constable, who now and then went the rounds of the parish through the night. Probably he had come this way because of the funeral that had taken place that afternoon. Probably the squire had told him to give a look at the churchyard that night—perhaps at the grave itself. For that he had been uneasy seemed quite certain ; some old story of body-snatching had worried him, perhaps, and sent him from his own bed at dead of night to patrol the graveyard for the satisfaction of his doubts. Con-

stable Green probably had orders to enter in at the gate and walk round the grave itself to see that all was sure.

These were the convictions of Stephen Endicott, and they turned him sick and cold with terror. Yes, surely he was right. The footsteps paused—there came the click of the gate as it turned upon its hinges; the gravel of the pathway crunched beneath the policeman's solid soles. How far would he come? What did he see? Stephen, lying flat and motionless upon the ground, held his breath in utter terror. His hand was clasped upon something in his trousers pocket—a neat, shining little toy, which he had brought out with him that night, and which, if necessary, he was ready to use, not on another if he could help it, but on himself. He did not intend to be taken alive, supposing that Constable Green saw him and came that way.

But he was better protected than he knew. The grave was in a slight hollow, and a great ash tree cast, even in the daytime, a thick shadow above it. Close behind the ash tree were a green bank and a lofty hedge. The night was very dark, and two or three rosebushes stood up between the pathway and the grave itself, thus hiding from a spectator's eye the fact, which might possibly have been discerned by a keen observer even in the darkness, that there was a

yawning trench where a green mound should have been, and that three silent figures lay on the wet ground at its side. Constable Green was a little short-sighted and decidedly obtuse. He saw nothing, and the stillness was unbroken. He paused as a dash of rain flung itself in his face, and decided that it was no use to go any further. Everything was quiet—"quiet as the dead," he muttered to himself. He turned round again and made his way to the gate. He had forgotten his bull's-eye, and he was rather glad to get away without encountering the squire, or any other person in authority. The squire had told him that he himself would probably walk round the churchyard about three o'clock in the morning.

When the heavy footsteps died away, Stephen roused himself again. What more was there to do? The night was getting on; it was indeed early morning now. His first plan had been to carry both bodies away, but he recognized now that this would be well-nigh impossible. He could not carry both at once, and two journeys to the Manor House and back would involve a greater strain upon his nerves, as well as a greater expenditure of time, than he was prepared to allow. An idea then came to him which seemed like a veritable inspiration, though of evil rather than of good.

Why not bury the dead man in his wife's grave? Then there could be no discovery, no inquiry into the manner of his death. It might be supposed that he had gone abroad. He would repose there, safe and undisturbed. His boy would pass the grave with reverence and never learn that it was his father's, and not his mother's, resting place. It seemed the best, the most feasible plan. And so, with what strain and torture of body and of mind no one would ever know, Stephen Endicott at last succeeded in placing Harry Crawford in the dead woman's coffin and in laying the coffin-lid above his clay-cold face. The man's body was too long for the coffin, but the limbs were still supple, and Dr. Endicott had little difficulty in arranging them. And then came the easier task of shoveling the earth back into the grave.

This did not take long. Stephen had carefully laid aside the green sods with which the mound had been banked up, and the flowers that had covered it. These could be replaced so as to look as if no one had touched them. The hardest part of his work was the stamping down and pressing together of the soil, before the replacement of the green sods and the wreaths. It seemed to Endicott just then as if he were actually trampling upon his dead friend's face.

When the task was completed, he

stood for a moment in silence. What more could he do or say? Yet, with an odd reversion to the belief and practice of his youth, he felt as if it were not right to go away without the saying of a prayer over the remains. And yet how could he pray? He stood in silence, then raised his hat from his head as if in reverence, and did not replace it until he had turned aside. He had no time to waste in sentiment. There was more to be done. And the church clock struck five.

This was the hour at which many of the laboring men of Fenby went to their work. There was indeed no time to be lost. If he met one of them in the lane he might almost give up hope of escape. For the sight of a strange bearded man—no, not bearded by the way, for Harry had pulled the beard aside, and it had disappeared: probably it was buried in his grave—of Dr. Endicott, then, with a heavy sack on his shoulders, walking from the churchyard to his home—that would infallibly rouse suspicion. No, that risk must not be run.

Lilian Crawford's body was concealed in the sack, and lifted heavily to the doctor's shoulders. He could not possibly carry all his tools as well. But he hid some of them in the hedge, and thought that he should have time to fetch them away before anyone else was about. Then he walked to the gate,

listened there for a moment to make sure that no one was coming along the lane, and made the best of his way to the path that led into the grounds of the Manor House. He was dangerously late—much later than he had expected to be—and in the country all sorts of folk were likely to be abroad at five o'clock in the morning. Laborers, farm people, gardeners, servants, whom might he not meet? The weather was certainly in his favor; for rain had begun to fall steadily, and no one would come out who could stay at home. And, as it chanced, he reached the house without meeting a single soul.

Yes, he was safe at last. So he said, as he deposited his burden on the laboratory floor, and locked and bolted and double-locked the door. But although he might be safe from actual pursuit and immediate discovery, his work was not yet done. He still had his tools to fetch—his spade and lantern, his pick-ax and minor implements. After a few minutes of repose, therefore, he once more sallied forth. This time he walked less hurriedly. Even if he met anyone, it need not be thought very strange that he should be out at that hour. All the servants knew that he was an early riser.

Again he was successful. He found the tools as he had left them, and brought them back to the house without encountering anyone. He placed them

on the floor beside the silent burden which meant so much to him; then bolted and barred doors and windows, and made his way quietly to his own room. Here he divested himself of his rough clothes and hid them again in the box from which they had been taken. And here also he made a discovery. The keys still hung in the lock of his bureau, but it had been opened and partially ransacked. Not only the twenty-five pounds which he had promised to Martin Dale had been extracted, but a large sum besides. It was very evident that the young man had given up the doctor's experiment for lost, and, knowing that he would not be paid for the work that he had abandoned and that possibly he might meet with public disgrace, had chosen to help himself out of the doctor's stores and fly from the spot. He knew well enough that Endicott would not be inclined to prosecute.

"The fellow has not done badly," said Stephen, with a curious smile. "And it is all the better that he should be out of the way. He will know nothing about Crawford, at any rate."

Then a touch of human weakness overcame him. He turned sick and giddy; he had only just time to get to his bed before an overwhelming fit of faintness blotted out the world to him for a time. The strain had been very great,

and even Endicott's herculean strength was not proof against it. When his faintness left him he was conscious of great exhaustion ; and before long he fell into a deep slumber which lasted for many hours. No one disturbed him, as it was well known that he often worked late into the night, and it was high noon before he roused himself next day.

He woke to a feeling of terrible depression. Willingly would he have remained secluded in his room for the rest of the day ; every limb was aching, every pulse throbbed, and a feverish exhaustion seemed to have taken complete possession of him. But he dared not stay in retirement. Inquiries might be made ; suspicion would be excited ; and, moreover, the ghastly contents of that sack in the laboratory required instant attention. No delay was possible there, if he were indeed to put the seal on his discoveries by a *post-mortem* examination of Lilian Crawford's body.

By a great effort, he dressed himself as usual and went downstairs to a late breakfast or luncheon, of which he forced himself to partake. He stealthily examined the faces of the servants to see whether he could read in them traces of suspicion, but there was nothing to be seen. One of the maids only came up to him with a semblance of hesitation.

"If you please, sir, is Mr. Dale gone away?"

"Yes," said the doctor, with perfect ease. "He took a night train to London, and will not be back for some time, if at all."

"If you please, sir, he's not taken any luggage with him."

"No," said Endicott equably. "I am to take it with me when I go up. Put his things together, if he has left them about."

"Yes, sir. And, if you please, sir, have you heard——"

"Heard what?"

"They say, sir, that Mr. Crawford of the Hall is a-missing, and can't be found anywhere. And they say, sir, that he's made away with himself for love of his wife."

"Nonsense," said Dr. Endicott. "He'll come home again, no doubt."

"Perhaps so, sir," said the maid-servant respectfully. "But the general idea is that he's shot himself or something, not being able to bear the separation, like."

"Oh, I trust not!" said the doctor, in quite a sincere and natural tone. And then he went down to the laboratory, and applied himself to the work that wanted doing there.

CHAPTER VIII.

HAROLD'S GUARDIAN.

THE village was ringing with the news. The squire had disappeared.

Constable Green was the last person who had interviewed him. He reported that the squire had seemed "oneasy-like," and had told him to walk up the lane, by the churchyard, in the course of his night patrol. "For my mind misgives me that there's something wrong brewing," the squire said, "and I should like to know that the churchyard is quiet, at any rate. I shall most likely walk round there, Green, about two or three in the morning. I should like to see for myself that it's all right."

"Now what could the squire ha' been thinking was wrong?" was the villagers' question.

"It's my opinion," said an old woman, who was listening to the talk, "that he didn't think the missus 'ud lay quiet in her grave. For it was him as sent her there, in a manner of speaking, and without a word of warning; and maybe he thought that she had summat more to say."

"Howd your tongue, Sally Grier," said the constable magisterially. "The squire, he do know better nor that. I

went myself, right round the churchyard, about three o'clock, but he wasn't there hisself, nor nobody else ; and the place was still as the grave."

"Mr. Jacobs is here. He can tell us whether it looked as though anyone had been nigh the grave last night," said another man, as the sexton came into the room. Jacobs was a withered little old man, in a rusty black coat and battered silk hat with a piece of crape fastened round it ; he had a semi-ecclesiastical air, as of one who knew that he belonged to the Establishment, and was treated with respect by all the frequenters of the Red Lion, where the conclave was being held. "Mr. Jacobs can tell us," said the plowman deferentially, as he made way for the old man on the settle by the fire.

"Aye, aye, all I know I can tell ye," said Mr. Jacobs, in a high, thin voice. "And it's little enough on this occasion. The pore lady at the 'All has been took from us, and it seems likely that the pore squire have already followed of her to the Better Land."

"Then you think the squire's dead, Mr. Jacobs? Do you think he's made away wi' hissen, loike?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Jacobs, with dignity. "I'm ashamed o' ye, Will Stevens, to put a question like that to me. The squire knew his duty better than that, he did. No, he's been strook

down by 'the visitation of God,' somewhere or other, and we shall find him stiff and stark in a day or two, and lay him aside of his pore wife, you may take my word for that."

There was a pause of awed admiration, during which Mr. Jacobs called for a pipe and a mug of beer, and when he had obtained both, he resumed his monologue.

"I said it to the vicar, this morning, I did. I says to him, when I heard that Mr. Crawford was nowhere to be found, I says—'Take my word for it, sir, we shall find as 'ow it's the visitation of God,' and the vicar, he says to me, 'Jacobs, you're generally right; I don't know how the parish would get on without 'ee,' says he; and I don't deny but what he spoke the truth."

"Was there any marks round about the grave next morning, Mr. Jacobs?" said one of the men.

"Marks there was, and plenty of 'em," said Jacobs oracularly. "No doubt Mr. Crawford had been there, a-walkin' round the grave of the dead lady, an' maybe altering the arrangement of them wreaths. The place was pretty well trampled about; but that was on'y what was to be expected, seeing as how such a crowd had been there the day before. It'll be a long time afore that part o' the churchyard looks trim an' neat again."

"Pore little master, oop at t' House, he be in a foine waay, I heer tell," said the plowman. "Mother dead, feyther vanished away, loike ; what's a-goin' to become of 'un?"

"The doctor's a-looking arter him," said Jacobs, with authority. "Parson tow'd me that, he did. 'Dr. Endicott's a old friend,' says he, 'and to the best o' my belief he's guardian, or summat to the little chap, and you couldn't have a better man,' says he. Not that I ever took a fancy to t' doctor myself. He's a down-looking chap, very silent an' quare in his ways."

"Let's hope he'll do right by the boy," said one of Jacobs' listeners, and with this sentiment the audience heartily agreed.

The rumor that Dr. Endicott was guardian to the squire's boy was truer than most rumors of the kind. But it was as yet only a rumor, caused chiefly by the doctor's peculiar thoughtfulness and kindness toward little Harold. As soon as the news of Mr. Crawford's disappearance was brought to his ears (for he could do nothing until that disappearance became matter of common talk) he conferred with the vicar, and then went up to the Hall, and offered to take little Harold to the Manor House, so that he might have Alice for a companion. The vicar, who had some suspicion that a quarrel had taken place

between him and the squire, looked rather shrewdly at him when he made this proposition. "And what will Crawford say when he comes home and finds that you have got his boy?" he said.

Stephen had a terrible temptation to answer, "He never will come home again." But he commanded himself, and replied with great quietness, "I do not think that he could object. There are, I believe, no relations that can take the child."

"That is true," said the vicar reflectively. "And I can't have him, that's certain; my children are down with measles. Well, take him home with you for a day or two, Endicott. I'm sure it's very kind of you, and we may hear from Crawford soon. I fancy he's just gone off in his wild way to the ends of the earth—thinking to get rid of his sorrows in that manner—and that he will write to us before long."

"Very likely," said Dr. Endicott. And all the time he knew that Harry Crawford was lying in his wife's grave, and that Lilian's body had found a resting place at the Manor House, and would have to be disposed of in some way before very long. He had made the examination, and had gained the results he wished for; but he had not yet given decent burial to poor Lilian's remains.

It sickened him to think of receiving

Harold under the roof where his mother still lay unburied ; but there was no way out of the emergency. He, Stephen Endicott, was bound to act like the kind, thoughtful friend of the family, and in this character he could not leave Harold alone at the Hall. Besides, a consuming remorse was gradually taking possession of his soul. He had deprived the lad of a father ; what could he do but give him another home and as much fatherly care as it was in his power to bestow ? He brought him to the Manor House, therefore, although his soul revolted against his own action ; and when this was settled he set himself to another task—that of disposing of those remains of the dead for which he had sacrificed so much. Until this was done—until his discovery had been perfected and the traces of his method removed—he would not give himself leisure to think. He refused to consider what had happened, and what the world would say to it ; he refused to acknowledge to himself that he had killed his oldest friend, and was in effect a murderer. “It was for the good of the world that he did it,” he obstinately continued to tell himself. He had been obliged, unintentionally, to do evil that good might come.

Little did poor Harold guess what went on during the first night of his sojourn at the Manor House. It would no doubt have been safer if Dr. Endicott

could have put off his operations until a time when servants and all ordinary occupants of the house were absent ; but he found it impossible to wait. All he could do was to manage the matter with the utmost secrecy and dispatch. After some deliberation he fixed on a certain patch of ground near the garden door of his laboratory : a bit of shrubbery which was within sight of only one window of the house, and this window belonged to a room which Dr. Endicott had made his library. Hence he was able to insure himself against observation by his servants. Having locked the library door, for two nights he toiled in the shrubbery, digging a deep pit or hole, which he made as little like a grave as possible. During the day that intervened, he concealed the hole by a cover of brushwood and bramble ; and then passed hours of torture lest anyone—child, or gardener, or stable-helper—should come that way and explore the recesses of that shrubbery. All day long he sat in the library, and looked from the window upon that fateful spot ; unable for once to read or write or even to think of anything, except of the horror that would accompany the discovery of the deed that he had done.

On the second night it seemed to him, after long and exhausting labor, that he had made the pit deep enough. Then, in the early hours of the morning, he

went once more into the laboratory, and brought out—something—enveloped in a cloth, something that was not fit to be looked on by the eye of man. Yet it was not with disgust and horror, but with feeling akin to reverence of the most sacred kind, that he laid what had once been Lilian Crawford's body in the unhallowed grave which was all that he could give. And for a moment, at least, his eyes were dim with tears when the earth fell with a dull thud upon the dead woman's breast, and half involuntarily he murmured to himself the words of the Burial Service : "Ashes to ashes—dust to dust."

It was a last indulgence in what some men would have termed sentiment. When the grave was filled in, he straightened his bowed shoulders, stood up erect, and looked, with stern brow and set lips, toward the eastern sky, where the light of a new morning showed dim and pale. "It is a new day ;" so ran the unspoken thought. "Let it be a new day in every respect. I have wrung this new discovery at the greatest possible risk and pain from the very lives of those that I loved. If I use it for the good of humanity ; if lives are saved by it, and souls are blessed ; surely my own guilt, my murderous blow, may be forgiven by the God—if God there be—to whom alone it is known ? Surely the fact that I have

unintentionally taken life may be counterbalanced by my power to preserve it. Let the new day open for me upon a new career, in which I swear to renounce my old ambitions and labor only for the good of humanity. I have not taken life to benefit myself ; I shall go mad unless I remember that. I am not guilty of murder ; I am the victim of circumstances, that is all. And therefore I can go about the world with head erect and a light heart, or at least a clear conscience, if not a light heart exactly ; and of what I have done I will not be ashamed."

And as he walked back to the house, his face was set in a stern composure which altered its lines and made it as the face of another man.

There were surprises in store for the town of Bourneby and its neighboring village, Fenby, for the next few days and weeks. To begin with, Dr. Endicott suddenly manifested an extreme desire to take the Manor House for a term of years. He even expressed a hope of being able to buy it some day, but there did not seem much likelihood of his effecting the purchase, as its owner was not at all inclined to sell. But this owner, Major Marriott to wit, was rather pleased with the idea of letting the house for a term of years. He liked to live abroad, as he was in delicate health, and he was not at all in

particularly good circumstances. Dr. Endicott was liberal in his offers, representing that the place suited his requirements very well; that his little daughter needed country air, and that he could leave her there with her governess while he went up to London, whence he could return for the Sunday. Seeing him so anxious, Major Marriott drove a good bargain, as he considered, and let the Manor House of Fenby to him for seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years. He little thought that the chief attraction to Fenby, in Dr. Endicott's eyes, lay in a certain oblong space of turf, half hidden by the overhanging branches of ilex and laurel bushes, where the woman was buried whose tombstone and epitaph confronted all beholders in Fenby churchyard.

Scarcely had the excitement caused by Dr. Endicott's determination to settle down in Fenby died away, when the interest of the inhabitants was piqued from another quarter. Some article of clothing belonging to Harry Crawford was found in the neighboring piece of water, and from this fact it was argued that he had drowned himself. In reality, the piece of clothing had come there through pure accident, and legally his death could not be proved; but the law stepped in to provide for the guardianship of his son and the administration of his estates. And when a sufficient

time had passed away, it was found that Stephen Endicott was the man to whose hands the boy Harold had been intrusted. Harry Crawford had left behind him a document in which he declared his full faith in his old friend's integrity and kind-heartedness, and constituted him sole guardian of his son.

This document had, of course, been executed before Crawford had quarreled with his friend, and it expressed his feelings at that time ; but it certainly struck remorse to Stephen Endicott's soul. When he first heard it his head sank and his face turned pale. His impulse was to refuse the trust committed to him and refuse to have any responsibility with regard to Harold. But when he breathed a word to this effect the clergyman and the lawyer who were with him at the time ejaculated surprise and disapproval.

"My dear Endicott," said the vicar, "it is not like you to show unkindness to an orphan boy."

"There is no unkindness about it," said Endicott. "I have reason to think that poor Crawford would have changed his mind, if he had had time. He and I had some—some slight disagreement before the late unfortunate occurrence, and I fancy that he——"

"Fancy ! What is fancy, my dear sir?" said the lawyer contemptuously. "Here is the written document, drawn

up by myself. I, if anyone, ought to know Mr. Crawford's mind upon the matter, and he told me with his own lips that there was none in the world whom he trusted and respected as he did you."

Stephen Endicott sighed in spite of himself. The vicar looked at him curiously. He had had some experience of the world, and, if he were not so shrewd a man as the lawyer, he was at least more sympathetic. There was something in the shadow that hung over Endicott's brow which startled him a little ; he did not know why.

Endicott observed the look, and pulled himself together without loss of time. It would never do to let the vicar suspect that anything was wrong. Sooner than that, he must accept all the responsibilities of the position.

"I have no wish to draw back from an act of justice and kindness," he said gravely. "Mr. and Mrs. Crawford showed me great friendliness, great hospitality, and I shall be glad to requite it in ever so small a degree ; but I hesitate lest I should seem to force myself into a position which the boy's parents might not wish me to assume."

An unnecessarily elaborate speech, thought the vicar ; but he did not speak, and it was the lawyer who remarked in a grumbling tone :

"Why, you've had the boy in your

house for the last few months, Endicott !”

“That was a different matter from formally taking him under my guardianship,” said the doctor promptly. “However, I am ready to do anything I can for him. There seem no friends likely to come forward on his behalf.”

“And if there were,” said the vicar, “there are no friends so likely to act in accordance with his father’s wishes as yourself.”

Dr. Endicott seemed strangely impressed with this observation.

“No,” he said, in a tone of deep feeling ; “no—that is true. No one could be so anxious to do well by the boy as I should do. No one else could care for him so much.”

“Very creditable to you, that feeling,” said the lawyer approvingly. “Then I understand, Dr. Endicott, that you will take the trust committed to you by Mr. Crawford’s instructions ?”

“Yes,” said Stephen Endicott firmly. “I will.”

And it puzzled the vicar afterward to reflect that he said it in the tone of one who takes upon himself a heavy burden ; a responsibility and a care which would tend to sadden and weigh down the whole of his future life. It seemed somewhat inexplicable to the vicar.

However, neither he nor anyone else

could find fault with the way in which the doctor performed his functions as Harold Crawford's guardian during the next few years. He looked after the boy and the boy's estate twice as well as Harold's own father would have done. And for this reason, if for no other, all the world declared that Hal, as he was generally called, would do well to be very grateful to Stephen Endicott when he came to man's estate.

But gratitude, without affection, involves a strain upon a lad's nature which is sometimes hard to endure.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SON AND THE DAUGHTER.

THE sunshine of a lovely day in July lay broad and bright over the meadowland round Fenby. In the gardens of Bourneby Hall the light was subdued by the foliage of stately trees and carefully trimmed shrubberies, and the terrace lay deep in shadow before the house, which seemed half buried in clustering wreaths of clematis and rose.

It was long since the Hall had been inhabited. The question of a tenant had been mooted again and again, but it had always been put aside. For this there had been several reasons. To be-

gin with, the law had not pronounced Harry Crawford dead ; it had but allowed the very much encumbered estate to be administered for the benefit of his son. It was well known that Harry Crawford had disliked extremely the idea of letting the house to strangers, and his executors did not think themselves precisely justified in doing what he would have forbidden. "We should be in a nice hole if he came back again," the lawyer had said to Dr. Endicott. And although the doctor knew well enough that Harry Crawford never would come back, he did not dare to act upon that knowledge. Then the boy, Harold, or Hal, as he was more familiarly termed, as soon as he was old enough to be consulted, also developed his father's aversion to the idea of letting the house. He would rather be poor all his days, he said, than see the dear old place in the hands of strangers. And so Bourneby Hall had remained untenanted, except by a caretaker, for many a long day.

The Manor House had been Hal's home in holiday-time. Dr. Endicott had always made him welcome. The lad had been sent to Eton and Christ Church, and on an expensive foreign trip afterward. People wondered at Dr. Endicott's cleverness in managing the property, for everyone knew that it was in an embarrassed state at the time of

poor Harry Crawford's disappearance. But the young fellow always seemed to have plenty of money, and lived like a man of fortune ; and he never suspected that his opulence and freedom from anxieties came through the quiet generosity of the man who called himself his guardian.

But on this sunshiny July afternoon, there was an air of life and stir about the old Hall which betokened some new development of events. Smoke was rising from the kitchen chimneys ; servants occasionally appeared at the window ; and on the terrace, beside the open glass door which had led of old to Lilian Crawford's sitting room, stood a young girl, dressed in white, with an air of mingled expectancy and joy, which told of some delightful anticipation with which her heart was filled.

She was a lovely girl, golden-haired and fair-skinned, with the great dark eyes which had been the distinguishing feature of her face in childhood, still expressive of a wonderful sweetness and an appealing trust. She had not much florid color, but its delicate tints showed perfect health, and there was the gracefulness of muscular strength in every limb, although at first sight she seemed slender. But Alice Endicott's training had included physical as well as mental education, and her father was almost prouder of her powers of endurance, her

walking and riding and swimming, than of her achievements, which were by no means inconsiderable, in mathematics and physical science. She was a very good specimen of the modern girl, well educated, well trained in every respect; and she possessed also, what some modern girls do not possess, a very sweet and loving nature, which exhibited itself in all relations of life. She was exceedingly devoted to her father, and very fond of Miss Murray, the lady who had lived at the Manor House and directed her education for several years; she had plenty of affection for her friends, the vicar and his family, the girls whom she had met in London, the poor folk of the parish; and, although she scarcely knew it as yet, she had given her heart, above all, to the friend and companion of her youth, the boy who had spent many weeks and months of his life in her society, Harold Crawford, the virtual owner and master of Bourneby Hall.

No, she had not as yet found out how much she cared for him. But she knew that his home-coming brought joy to her heart, and she believed that he was as glad to return to her as she was to see him. And this particular home-coming was a special joy. For he had been away on his travels for nearly a year, and there was a rumor current—although it could not be traced to any

written words of his—that he meant to settle down in his own home, and lead the life of an English country gentleman. The law had now decreed that Harry Crawford was at last to be considered a dead man, and that his son and heir might take possession of his house and lands ; and although Harold had shown no eagerness to avail himself of the law's consent (for he was now nearly three-and-twenty), yet the time seemed to have come for him to claim his own position in the place.

He was expected that evening, but not until ten o'clock, so that Alice had felt quite justified in stealing up into the Hall with a great basket of roses, with which she filled the vases in his mother's room. She knew that that would please him. He remembered his mother with passionate affection, and her rooms were still sacred in his eyes. Alice also had been inspired by him with the same half-venerating devotion to her memory ; and in this sympathy of feeling there was a bond which drew them into closer union than they knew.

She had made the room beautiful with her flowers, and turned to go—pausing a little at the open door to look at the lovely view of sun and shade—when a quick step rang out upon the terrace walk, and with a start she recognized the fact that Harold was there already,

was close upon her, and would find her at his mother's door.

She blushed deeply as he came up to her, half from pleasure, half from surprise. It was only when he grasped her hands and looked down, smiling, into her face that she was able to find words.

"O Hal! We did not expect you yet—not until ten o'clock; so I came up here to put some roses into the room."

"I could not wait," said Hal. "I found myself in London with nothing to do, and I took the first train to Bourneby. Don't say you are sorry to see me so soon!"

"Sorry! I am very glad," she answered, and there was a ring of sincerity in her voice which convinced him that the words were spoken from her heart.

"So am I very glad," he said, reluctantly letting her withdraw her slender hands from his close clasp. "More glad than I can say. And you look just the same, Alice—nearly the same that is——"

"Oh, am I altered, Hal? Do I look older?"

"No," he said slowly and meditatively. "Not older."

She pretended to pout a little. "I want to look older. Miss Murray says I don't look a day over eighteen, and you know I am nearly twenty-one."

"Are you really? Well, like Miss

Murray, I can only say that you don't look it."

"How do I look then? You said I was 'nearly' the same: how have I altered?"

"I don't know how to tell you," he said naïvely. "I only meant that you look dearer and sweeter and prettier than you ever did, and I was half afraid that you would be offended if I put it into words."

She blushed a little, but she did not seem to be offended. A little smile came and went about the corners of her mouth.

"I am glad you think I look nice," she said. "Do you know, I was thinking, Hal, how much you had—improved, if I may use the word."

"I needed a lot of improvement, I know," said Hal, somewhat remorsefully.

"Oh, I don't mean that. But you do look older—though I am afraid you won't take it as a compliment; and oh, Hal, how your mustache has grown!"

They laughed gleefully, after the manner of youth, and then for a moment stood in silence, looking at one another as if they did not know how to turn their eyes away.

He was a handsome man, and Alice was cognizant of the fact. But what she had always liked better than his beauty of form and feature—what she

now looked for most eagerly and found unchanged—was the kindness of his eyes, the frankness and sincerity of his expression, the index, as she felt, to the real goodness of heart within. He was not much like his father: he had his mother's look, but with it a strength of thew and sinew such as came from his father's side. Two finer and more beautiful specimens of humanity could scarcely have been found in the British Isles than the two who now stood upon the terrace at Bourneby Hall.

Alice's eyes dropped first. "I must be going home," she said.

"Won't you give me a few minutes?" he asked, with a new gentleness in his voice. "Come into my mother's room with me again; how often we have been here before! Alice, when I come here I almost feel as if I were entering a church. The place is sacred to me."

"It is her memory that makes it so. Her presence seems to hang about it still."

He drew her by the hand over the threshold, and they stood together in the room where Lilian Crawford had spent so many of her hours—hours sometimes of joy, sometimes of acutest suffering. Harold's eyes softened as he looked round. Nothing was changed: everything was as it had been in his mother's time, except that a beautiful water-color sketch of Mrs. Crawford,

executed a few months only before her death, hung above the mantelpiece, in the place where a portrait of Hal himself, as a child, used to be.

"You are right," said the young man presently. "It seems as if she still were here."

"Yes."

"I should not like the room to be changed in any way. It would seem like banishing her. Don't you think so?"

"Ah, yes! I could not bear to have anything changed," said Alice, almost with passion. "One almost expects to see her here again——"

Hal put out his hand and took hers again.

"Nobody understands but you," he said. "Nobody can sympathize but you. I think, Alice, that you and I are the only people who remember her."

"We remember her best," said the girl. "But the vicar remembers her very well, and often speaks to me of her."

"But she is more to us than to anybody else," persisted Harold. "And I have been thinking, while I was away, a great deal about the permanence of affection, and what it means to keep the ties that are formed in childhood. All these memories of the past have become inexpressibly dear to me, Alice. They are dear to you, are they not?"

"Dearer," she said, scarcely knowing

how much her words implied ; "dearer than anything else on earth !"

"Is there any reason," he asked, "why they ever should be broken ?"

She did not answer, but the blood rushed to her face. His question threw her into strange confusion, and she scarcely knew what it meant.

"Is there any reason," he asked again, "why we should drift apart ? why other interests should come into our lives, and we should ever be alienated one from the other ? You would not like that, would you, Alice ? Tell me that it would cost you dear, too."

"Yes, Harold, indeed it would," she murmured.

"It seems to me, Alice, that it would break my heart. I have thought it all out, you see, while I was away ; and I see quite plainly that nobody in the whole world can be to me what you are, and that I can never love anyone as I love you. Alice, won't you try to love me a little, too ?"

"O Hal," she said faintly, "I have loved you all my life, you know. We have been like brother and sister."

"But I don't want to be like a brother to you any more," said Hal.

There was a little silence, during which he drew her closer to his side.

"Alice, won't you be something even nearer and dearer than a sister ? Will you not, one day, be my wife ?"

She could not answer quite coherently ; she stammered out something about " never having thought," " not knowing exactly," as girls, how cultured soever, are at such moments inclined to do ; but she did not repel his caressing hand, his circling arm, and he was emboldened, therefore, to continue his pleadings.

" No woman could ever be half so dear to me," he said. " You fill my heart, my thoughts, my whole mind and soul. I have thought of you all the time that I was away. Alice, have you had no thought of me ? Don't you care at all for me, or for my love ? "

" Yes, I care," she murmured, with a slight but expressive glance at him. But he would not be content without a more definite declaration.

" Do you love me, Alice ? "

" Yes, Hal, I have always——"

" But enough to be my wife ? "

The answer was not very distinct, but by this time he understood, and knew that he might put his arms about her and press his lips to hers. The silence lasted unbroken for a few minutes, and then he said softly :

" I think my mother would be glad."

" Perhaps she sees us now," said Alice. And then they looked at his mother's portrait, and it seemed to them both as if her blessing fell upon their heads.

"What will my father say, I wonder," the girl said at last.

For the first time a contraction, a very faint contraction, showed itself upon Harold's brow. He paused for a moment before replying.

"I will speak to him to-morrow."

"Will you, Harold? Or shall I tell him—to-night?"

"Would you rather, my darling? No, it is cowardly to let you speak——"

"But, Hal, he will be pleased."

"Will he?" said Hal. And then he looked away. But Alice gazed at him so anxiously that he smoothed his brow, kissed her again, and said soothingly; "I hope he will, dear. But when I think how unworthy I am of you, I cannot but feel that he will be justified if he objects to me very seriously as a husband for his treasure."

"I am sure he can have no objection," Alice said, rather indignantly. "And he was so fond of your father and mother, Hal, dear, and has always been so anxious and careful over your affairs, that I cannot feel as if he would have anything to say against it."

"Yes," said Hal, a little doubtfully. "And yet I have sometimes felt, Alice, as if your father did not like me."

"I am sure that must be a mistake," said Alice, with great decision—so much decision, in fact, that Harold felt for a

moment or two as if he must have been entirely in the wrong.

And yet—yet—he could not but remember what had long been the inmost conviction of his mind ; that, for some reason or other, he was unwelcome in Stephen Endicott's sight ; that the doctor tolerated him from a sense of duty, but was not in the least disposed to look upon him with an eye of favor. How he knew it he could not have told ; but that he did know it, he was certain, and not all Alice's asseverations could convince him of the contrary.

After a little while they went out on the terrace again, and walked to and fro, while he poured into her ears some of his plans for the future and stories of the past. Alice listened like one entranced. All his visions were bright ; there was only one blot upon the sunshine—and that lay in the memory of his father's disappearance, the doubt whether Harry Crawford were alive or dead. He touched upon this subject, even in his conversation with Alice, at the supreme moment of his life.

"I have never felt satisfied," he went on, "that the whole truth came to light about my father. I think that a little more energy might perhaps have resulted in some discovery."

"I am sure my father did what he could, Hal," said Alice, almost reproachfully.

"Yes, darling, I am sure he did. But one has just that feeling, you know—and even now I should like to examine all the evidence. I have never done it before, and surely it is a son's duty in such a case as mine. Do you not think so?"

And Alice certainly thought so—because he did.

CHAPTER X.

A FALSE STEP.

HAL walked home with Alice to the Manor House, but he did not stay there, for, as he had already written to tell his friends, he intended now to take up his abode at the Hall. He would not even dine at the Manor House, although Miss Murray, who was practically guest-mistress, pressed him to return; but he had a scruple against doing this until Dr. Endicott had heard what he had to say. Harold Crawford was scrupulously high-minded and honorable; and although he had been betrayed by the strength of his own feeling into an avowal of the passion that possessed him, he was resolved not to encroach until he had obtained the doctor's consent to his suit. And Dr. Endicott was not to be at home that

night. He would not return to Fenby until the morrow, and Harold therefore denied himself the delight of an evening with Alice and Miss Murray.

It will easily be seen, from even this one fact, that Harold Crawford was not altogether a commonplace young man. He had a very sensitive nature, a noble ideal of what life should be, a chivalrous respect for all women. The only fault toward which he was inclined to be unforgiving was anything that savored of deceit. His creed on this point was severe. A deliberate concealment or falsification of the truth seemed to him an unpardonable sin. His mother's finely toned, high-souled nature seemed to have been inherited by him ; but he had lost her before she could teach him to love and to pardon even where he was obliged to blame.

This unbending truthfulness had plunged him into many scrapes during his boyhood, and not endeared him to Stephen Endicott, who, while valuing the quality, feared it, lest it should ever be brought into action against himself. He had never tried in the least to decrease Harold's love for the virtue of truth ; he had even praised it on necessary occasions ; but at the same time he almost hated him for it. If Hal had been a boy like other boys, with the shifts and evasions and ready deceptions of the ordinary schoolboy, Stephen

Endicott felt that he could have liked him better. As it was he, the rich, well-known, successful doctor, was afraid of Hal Crawford. He tried most sedulously to do his duty by the lad ; but he was always happier when Harold was out of his sight, and he looked forward to the happy day, as he considered it, when his ward would be launched in life, and dependent on his good offices no longer. Then, he sometimes said to himself, he would leave Fenby. But there was a mysterious attraction about the place ; and it was borne in upon him now and then that he could never bear to live where from his study window he could not see a certain spot which always seemed to him strangely bare and obvious, although it was screened with many an ingenious invention from strangers' eyes.

He had turned a bit of the shrubbery into what he called a botanical garden, and given orders that the plants in it should never be disturbed, or even touched, except by himself. With his own hands he had made a little rockery above the spot that seemed to him so different from every other spot, and planted it with creeping plants and ferns. Even then it did not satisfy him, for Alice had one day exclaimed that it looked exactly like a monument ; and but for the fear of seeming eccentric and peculiar he would gladly have

pulled down every stone again and scattered them far and wide.

He was sitting in this study when Harold Crawford came to see him, soon after his arrival from town. He was at his desk, which stood in the center of the room, so that he could glance from his papers at any moment to Lilian Crawford's unknown grave. He had a more superstitious feeling about this grave than he had about the one where Harry Crawford lay ; perhaps because it was more immediately under his eyes, for, as a matter of fact, he had never once entered the churchyard since the day when he buried Harry Crawford in Lilian's coffin. His attachment to his "botanical garden" was often laughingly commented on by his daughter, who could not understand why the little jest brought a shadow to his brow.

Dr. Endicott laid down his pen and rose to his feet as Harold came into the room.

"Ah, Harold, here you are ! Alice told me you had arrived. How are you by this time ?"

The greeting was cheery, but the man's eyes were cold. Harold, however, was grateful for the greeting, and responded with effusion.

"I'm perfectly well, thank you, sir. I hope you're all right, too. I haven't seen you for such an age !"

"I am always well, thank you. Yes,

it is some time since we met. Had a pleasant time?"

"Yes, delightful. But I'm glad to be back again, all the same. There is no place like Fenby."

Dr. Endicott shivered a little, in spite of himself. No, there was no place like Fenby, even to him.

"You think of living at the Hall, I think you said?"

"Yes, I think so."

"The place will be the better for a master. There are some accounts we must go into to-morrow or next day, and Jelf will want to see you." Jelf was the lawyer. "I think you will find things in a tolerably satisfactory condition."

"I am sure I shall. Can you tell me offhand, sir, what is the exact amount of my income? When you explained matters to me two years ago, I'm afraid I was not very attentive. But now I should like to know more exactly."

Dr. Endicott nodded, took a piece of paper, and jotted down a few figures. These he finally added up, wrote a word or two, and pushed the paper over toward the young man. Then he turned his face toward the window and looked at the rockery over Lilian's grave.

Harold read, stared, and gasped a little, as at something for which he was not prepared.

"Three thousand seven hundred a

year," he said. "Why, I did not remember that it was so much."

"Rents have gone up," said the doctor quietly. "Then there was that legacy from an old friend of your father's. It has increased your income materially."

Harold asked no question about "the old friend." Young people take it as so natural that they and their parents should have "old friends." In this case, the "friend" had been Stephen Endicott, masquerading under another name. It had seemed good to him to endow Harold Crawford with some of the wealth that had flowed into his hands on account of a certain discovery that owed its origin to the illness of Harold's mother; but of course it was impossible to let the young man guess the fact. So Harold was richer than he had known.

"And you think," he said, with some hesitation, "that I am justified in taking upon me the responsibilities of the position?"

"Certainly," said Dr. Endicott decisively. "Why not? The law has empowered you to do so, as your father is hardly likely to be living, although no proof of his death exists."

"Legally I know that I am in my right," said Harold, still doubtfully, "but morally—am I really entitled to act as if I knew of his death?"

"Of course you are."

"And if he were not dead—if he came back—what——"

Dr Endicott made a movement of impatience. "My dear fellow, why do you harp on that subject? He will never come back. And if"—he added, suddenly controlling himself—"if that very unlikely event were to happen, no blame could be attached to you. He himself could not expect it to be otherwise."

"You speak very confidently of my father's death, sir," said Harold, in all innocence. "Have you had any further evidence?"

The doctor's face showed some annoyance. "None," he answered shortly.

"I should like—just for my own satisfaction—to go over all the accounts of his disappearance," pursued the young man. "Coming to it in complete ignorance of the details—for I have never examined them in a business-like way—I might hit on something which passed unnoticed then——"

"Do you suppose that you are cleverer than the experts? The best detectives were called upon to examine the facts. I am sorry that you attribute carelessness to our good friend Jelf and myself—who were responsible," said Dr. Endicott, with a dryness of tone which made Harold's heart jump into his mouth.

"I don't—indeed I don't!" he has-

tened to say, with great earnestness. "I know that everything was done that could be done. I owe you and Mr. Jelf the greatest gratitude for the care you took. I am well aware of that, sir, Pray, don't think me unmindful of it. I only fancied—just for a moment—that I might think of something new—a son, you know, sir, might think of things that had been forgotten by others, don't you think?"

The pleading tone did not mollify Dr. Endicott's anger. He still spoke with severity.

"It is easy for the young to say what they would have done in circumstances in which they were never placed; easier still for them to suppose that they would have managed a matter better than men of keen intellect and great experience. I cannot pretend to convince you of your error; but I can assure you that the estimation in which you seem to hold yourself has not been justified by the reports I used to receive of your college career."

Harold flushed hotly. He knew that he had not done quite so well at Oxford as he was expected to do. At the same time Dr. Endicott had no business, he thought, to use that tone to him. It was the old manner, the old tone, that had cowed him now and then when he was a boy—the chilly sarcasm, the want of sympathy which had been so painful

to him now and then. But he resolved that he would not be borne down by it now. He would strive to propitiate this cold, scornful man—not for his own, but for Alice's sweet sake, remembering that after all he was the arbiter of his daughter's fate.

"I know—I know I was very presumptuous, sir. I beg your pardon for seeming to take too much upon me."

"Oh, it is what one expects from young men," said the doctor coolly. "I see a good deal of it at the hospitals. They learn better as they grow older—and so will you. Is there anything else you wanted to say?" And he fingered his papers, as though impatient to go on with his work.

"There is something else—something very important," said Harold. The moment was not propitious, and yet he felt that he could not wait. "I want to tell you, sir, that I found out when I was away what it was that had been the motive power and the ambition of my life. It has been my love—my true and earnest love—for your daughter, for Alice. I have loved her ever since she came here when we were children; and I want to know, sir, if—if you will give her to me as my wife?"

He spoke rapidly and earnestly, rising from his chair as he spoke, and standing with one hand on his guardian's desk. He was amazed at the sudden change in

Dr. Endicott's face. The doctor turned pale, then violently red, then white again. He did not speak, and for a moment it seemed as if he were positively unable to open his lips.

"You know all about me," Harold went on hurriedly, with an impulse to make the most of his chance. "You know my defects, my unworthiness of her. But I could give her a home that she would love—she loves it already—and I think I could make her happy."

"You have spoken to her?"

The irritation and satire had entirely disappeared. Stephen Endicott spoke in a low broken voice, as if he had received some sudden shock. Harold looked at him curiously as he answered :

"Yes, sir, I spoke last night. I know I ought to have waited—to have asked you first—but I could not help myself. And she loves me, too—you won't put a barrier between us ; will you, sir ?"

Dr. Endicott pushed back his chair, and rose in evident agitation.

"I never thought of this," he muttered, scarcely perhaps meaning Harold to hear.

"I hope you will think of it now, sir," ventured the young man.

"You say you have spoken to Alice ?"

"Yes."

"And you think she cares for you ?"

"I am sure she does." A modest triumph shone in Harold's eyes.

Stephen Endicott made some hasty exclamation beneath his breath which Harold could not catch. And perhaps it was just as well, for the exclamation was not of a complimentary nature to the man who had won his daughter's heart.

"I must speak to Alice before I give you an answer," the doctor said at length, in a calmer but very gloomy tone. "I am taken by surprise. I have nothing against you—no; but I had not thought of you as a husband for my daughter. And in point of fact, Harold"—assuming a friendlier tone—"I cannot disguise from you that your proposal puts me in a somewhat awkward position."

"I don't see why," said Harold eagerly.

"I have been your guardian, and I am—a man of honor," said Stephen Endicott, in a lofty tone. (Yet his eyes were fixed on Lilian Crawford's grave the while he spoke.) "It will be said that I have been guided by self-interest, and thrown my daughter in your way. That is an imputation which I should deeply resent."

"I should think so indeed! Everyone who knows you would know how unmerited it was. Why, Alice might marry anyone she pleases. I'm a shocking bad match for her," said Harold, with a laugh. It seemed to him that

Dr. Endicott's objection was but a trifling one. But the doctor did not smile.

"I can give her a dowry, of course," he said, as if that was the least part of the matter. "But I must consider, Harold. I trust to you not to say anything more to Alice until I have seen her—until I have thought over the matter."

"Very well, sir," said Harold, a little ruefully. "But when may I have your answer?"

Dr. Endicott was silent for a moment. "Next week," he said at last, looking out upon Lilian's grave; "next week; and you will not try to see Alice until then, remember."

"This is Thursday," said Harold, rather ruefully. "Must I wait so long?"

"Do you wish to rush upon your doom?" said Dr. Endicott, with a sudden flash of something like grim humor. And Harold took his leave with more depression of spirits than he would have thought possible earlier in the day.

But in the hall he met Alice. She had been wandering restlessly about the house, wondering why the interview between her father and Harold should last so long, and when, finally, he came out of the study, she flew to meet him, and put her hands upon his arm.

"What did father say?"

"I am not to try to see you, darling, until Monday," said the young man. "He wants a little time to consider, and he wants to talk to you first—to tell you how unworthy I am, I suppose."

"That is nonsense," said Alice decidedly, "and I shall tell him so. Where could he find anybody nicer and better than you? I am sure he knows that; but he is so careful of me that perhaps he just wants to ask me what I think—so don't be cast down, Hal, dear."

"You do love me; don't you, Alice?"

"Of course, I do; with all my heart."

"And you—you—won't give me up?"

"Never!" said the girl. And then the lovers exchanged a long, silent kiss; after which Harold departed, very much consoled and quieted in mind.

Meanwhile Stephen Endicott, locked in his own room, sat with his head bowed upon his hands, thinking over the events of the past years and the tokens of the future. "What shall I do? what shall I do?" he was saying to himself. "Is this the way out of the difficulty? Is this the way in which the harm, the wrong-doing, is to be remedied? If so, I am happier than I thought! But it cannot be!"

He rose and began to pace the room with hurried, uneven steps. "Can I let him do it?" he said to himself. "Shall

the son of a murdered man marry the daughter of the murderer? On first sight, it seems a revolting thought. But perhaps there is no other way of blinding his eyes, of making him put aside the suspicion with which he seems to be haunted! If ever he came to know—my God! what would become of me? and what would happen to my child!”

CHAPTER XI.

THE VICAR'S HELP.

FOR the next three days Harold was lonely and miserable indeed. His only solace lay in visiting his old friends in the village, and particularly in renewing his acquaintance with the vicar, who, as he knew, had been a friend of his parents in days gone by. Mr. Wykeham was a shrewd and kindly man, with a keen eye and a sense of the humorous which does not always exist among the country clergy. His wife was as kindly as he, but she was by no means clever; a feather-bed of a woman, of whom most people were fond.

It was not long before Mr. Wykeham found out that something was wrong with Harold. When he had come in for the second time on Saturday, in a restless way which was not customary

with him, and had refused a cigar which the vicar offered him, Mr. Wykeham felt that the time had come for an inquiry.

"Why, Hal," he said, "you're not like yourself. What's wrong?"

"Nothing," said Hal, laughing a little nervously. "At least I hope not."

"You hope not? I know what it is—you young fellows are all alike; you've lost your heart to some pretty girl or other, and don't know whether she will have you."

"You're not quite right, vicar, but you come near it. I'm not afraid about her, but about her father."

"It would be an odd sort of father who would take exception to you, young man," thought the vicar, but he did not say so. He sat silent, and waited for further explanations.

"It's Alice," said Harold, goaded by the silence into frankness.

"Alice! Not Alice Endicott!"

"Why not, I should like to know?" exclaimed Harold, firing up. "What is there to object to in my choice? Why does her father object to me? I beg your pardon, vicar, if I speak too hotly; but there's something about all this that I do not understand."

"You mistake, my dear boy. There is nothing extraordinary in your choice. Alice is a sweet, good girl, clever and pretty and refined; I am not in the

least surprised that you should admire her."

And yet there was an inscrutable dissatisfaction in the vicar's tone.

"And my father was her father's dearest friend," said Hal, rather defiantly.

The vicar said nothing.

"Do you mean to tell me that he was not?" demanded Harold, more in surprise than indignation.

The vicar crossed one leg over the other, and laughed a little.

"How you boys do run on," he said, good-humoredly. "Of course, they were great friends—friends almost all their life, I believe. There was some little rumor of a disagreement at one point—I heard Dr. Endicott say something about it; but I do not suppose that it really impaired the friendship of a lifetime."

"No, I don't suppose it did," said Harold, with a touch of defiance. But his tone fell a little. "I have not heard Dr. Endicott talk about my parents," he remarked.

"There seemed to be a great intimacy between them," the vicar answered cautiously.

Harold moved uneasily in his chair. It still appeared to him that something lay hidden behind the vicar's caution and the doctor's hesitation. But what it was he could not put into words. A kindred subject occurred to his mind.

"Mr. Wykeham," he said, somewhat awkwardly, "I was thinking—while I was away—that I know very little about the circumstances attending my father's disappearance."

"No?" said the vicar.

"They tell me," the young man went on, "that I am quite right in believing—now, at this distance of time—that he is dead."

"Quite, I should think, my boy. There can be no other explanation of his fate."

"And still I cannot help feeling that one ought to be able to get at the details a little more clearly. I know everything was done that could be done at the time, but——"

"You think you could have done more?"

"That's something like what the doctor said," remarked Harold ruefully.

"You have mentioned the subject to him?"

"Yes. And I'm afraid I blundered over it—made him fancy I thought he had been neglectful or something. He was annoyed, I am afraid—very much annoyed. And yet it seemed to me a natural thing enough that I should want to be assured that everything was done properly."

"Of course—of course, most natural," said the vicar.

"You don't blame me then, sir?" Harold asked anxiously.

"Certainly not. Perfectly natural and right. You don't mean that the doctor blamed you? No doubt he was annoyed for a moment, but——"

"More than that," said Harold, with a rather reluctant smile. "He was downright angry."

"Rather imprudent of you to have made him angry just when you wanted to ask him for his daughter, eh?"

"I suppose it was. I had no idea that he would be vexed. Of course, I can't say any more to him on the subject."

"I think I can assure you," said the vicar kindly, "that everything was done that ought to be done, Harold. The whole countryside was in a ferment. We had the best men down from Scotland Yard; but there was absolutely no trace of your poor father to be found. He disappeared completely. Almost the last man who saw him alive seems to have been Constable Green, who spoke to him late on the night of your poor mother's funeral. He was then well—sane—in great trouble, of course, but in other respects as hale a man and as likely to see threescore years and ten as any man you ever saw."

Harold kept a gloomy silence for a minute or two.

"It looks as if he had met with

foul play," he said at last, under his breath.

"He was the last man to have an enemy," said the vicar musingly.

"There seems no other explanation."

"I'll tell you what," said Mr. Wykeham, rising abruptly from his chair, "I'll tell you what I'll do, Harold, if you like. I preserved all the papers and documents relating to the case. There were full published reports ; and I have also several letters from the detectives. Now, if you like, I will put all these papers in your hands, and let you read them from beginning to end. That may satisfy your mind, at any rate, that we did at the time all that we could."

"I am sure you did, sir," said Hal, with brightening eyes ; "but I should like to see the papers. I was such a little chap when it all happened, you know, that I did not understand ; and later on, I scarcely liked to ask. But now it seem to me that it is my duty."

"Quite right, my lad, quite right," said the vicar approvingly.

"And especially," Harold continued, "since I am thinking of marrying and settling down in the old house."

"Ah, exactly !" said Mr. Wykeham, and Harold wondered why the heartiness seemed to have died out of his tone.

"Why didn't the boy make his investigations before he declared himself to

Alice Endicott?" the vicar was thinking, and did not stop to realize the doubts that he was in reality throwing upon the character and good faith of Alice Endicott's father. But, fortunately, perhaps, for our own happiness, we seldom follow out a train of thought to its quite logical conclusion. And Mr. Wykeham, while conscious of an uncomfortable suspicion, long entertained, that Dr. Endicott knew more of Harry Crawford's death than he chose to say, did not exactly mean that Harold was likely to discover proof of actual guilt in the man whose daughter he wished to marry.

He produced a pile of papers and offered them to his guest. "Sit down and look at them," he said kindly. "You're at a loose end, I know, with nothing to do; you'll have time to glance over them this afternoon."

But Harold preferred to take the papers home with him. It seemed to him that he could examine them more easily and accurately in his own house than in Mr. Wykeham's library. He made them all into a loosely tied parcel, and walked briskly back to Bourneby Hall. As he reached the entrance to his own grounds, from the lane which ran between the garden and the churchyard, he was accosted by a man whom he did not know, evidently a stranger in the place.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said. "Can you tell me whether a Mr. Crawford's living in this place?"

"My name is Crawford," answered Harold, looking at him sharply. "What do you want?"

He was not prepossessed by the man's appearance, which was seedy and unkempt in the extreme. He was tall, painfully thin, and clad in shabby black; his face, marked with smallpox scars, was pale and haggard, but blotched here and there with patches of unhealthy color which betokened dissipation or illness of long standing; his shifty, restless eyes were reddened about the rims, his hands shook as he moved them when speaking to a stranger. Harold set him down in his own mind as an habitual sot; a man who did not get drunk, but who "soaked" perpetually. The young squire had a dislike to fellows of this sort; it seemed to him that they scarcely deserved the name of men.

The stranger looked at him, started a little, and spoke in a curiously husky, yet insinuating, tone.

"You're young Mr. Crawford, I believe. It's your father that I think I want to see, sir."

It was Harold's turn to start. "My father!" he said. "You cannot have been to this place for many years, then?"

"Oh, he's dead, is he?" said the man quickly.

Harold almost wished that he could answer yes.

"We fear that he is dead," he answered gravely. "At any rate, he is not here—not to be found. What is your business with him?"

The man replied only by a counter-question :

"Where is he? When did he go away," he asked. "Is it long——"

Harold's brow contracted ; but he made an effort to answer civilly.

"My father has not been here since"—he mentioned the year of his mother's death. "If you have any business with him, any information to give, it is with me that you have to deal. Perhaps you know something about him? Perhaps"—with a dawning hope—"you have news to give us? You know that he—that he—is still—alive?"

The man looked at him with gathering surprise.

"I'm afraid I don't quite know what you're driving at, sir," he said, with a mixture of servility and familiarity which Harold inwardly resented. "Do you mean that you don't know whether he's alive or dead?"

"That is the state of the case. I thought everyone in this part of the country knew it, or I should not discuss family matters with a stranger," said

Harold, a little haughtily. "He has not been seen here since the day of my mother's funeral."

He could not help being astonished at the effect produced upon the stranger by this communication. The man drew back for a moment with a look of the profoundest amazement, and an exclamation which Harold thought at the least inappropriate.

"The devil he hasn't!" said the stranger, and stared at Harold more than ever. Then he burst out into a short, sharp laugh, and asked another question: "What became of Stephen Endicott then?"

"He lives at the Manor House, over there," said Harold, repressing a desire to kick the questioner. "You had better go to him, if you want to ask anything else."

"By the Lord, I will!" said the man, as he turned away. There was an odd, evil smile on his wide, pale lips. "And you're—friends—with him, are you?"

"What do you mean?" cried Harold, losing his temper at last. "What do you mean, you insolent fellow? Of course, I am on friendly terms with my father's old friend, and what have you to say against it? Be off with you; don't let me see you about my place again. Go to the doctor; he'll settle matters with you fast enough."

"All right," said the stranger coolly.

“I'll tell him I came from you. Good-evening, sir. I think I saw your father more recently than you have done—but I'll talk it over with the doctor.”

He flung the last words back over his shoulder, as he walked up the lane—not to the doctor's house, however, but to the churchyard. Harold stood with his hand on the topmost rail of the gate, panting with anger, yet almost inclined to run after the man and force him to explain himself. Still—if he were going to the doctor's, it would perhaps be almost better for him to speak with Stephen Endicott than with Harold himself. The young man felt that it would be impossible for him to listen calmly and dispassionately to what the stranger had to say. There was a natural antipathy between them.

He turned, therefore, and went back to the house.

Ensconced in the library, he spread the papers out before him, and went through them carefully. There was not very much, after all. Half a dozen newspapers, a few letters, a carefully written statement taken down by Mr. Wykeham from the lips of servant, sexton, and constable, of all they had seen of Harry Crawford on the day of his wife's funeral. Even Harold's shrewd sense and keen eyes could detect nothing abnormal in the story. There seemed to have been no sign of any mental or physical

disturbance—other than the deep grief for his wife's death from which he was evidently suffering. There had been no hint of suicide, no wish expressed even to leave the neighborhood. There was indeed a note from him to the vicar, in which he declared his intention of leading a quieter life, and of economizing for the sake of his boy. "That does not sound as if he were contemplating a violent end or sudden disappearance," said Harold, pushing away the paper at last with a baffled sense of disappointment.

He now felt bitterly the futility of his search. He recognized the truth of Dr. Endicott's statement that everything had been done, and that no stone had been left unturned in the search for the missing man. He had some remorse in his mind, as this thought occurred to him. No wonder Dr. Endicott had been indignant! And what a fool he had been to vex the doctor by such seeming distrust just when he was asking him for Alice's hand! Even the vicar had seen and demonstrated his folly to him.

The vicar! His name started a fresh train of thought. What was the meaning of his odd tone and manner? There had been something unexplained, Harold was sure of that. The testimony of the papers seemed conclusive enough; but the young man did not feel convinced. He had a curious sensation of some

coming disaster—was it a premonition of the truth? There flashed across his mind a memory of the words that the strange man in the shabby black clothes had used—that he had seen Harry Crawford more lately than almost anyone else had done. Did that mean that Harry Crawford was living now?

Harold grew so uneasy and excited over this possibility that he could not rest at home. He walked down to the village inn, and made inquiries as to the guests now staying there; but he could hear of nobody who answered to the description that he gave. The landlord opined that the stranger had walked over from Bourneby, and was staying there. If anyone like him came to the Red Lion, he promised to send up to the Hall and let “young measter” know. Harold took a stroll round by the churchyard and the lane, but he could see nothing of the stranger. Later in the evening he carried the papers back to Mr. Wykeham, and informed him of the colloquy which he had had.

“That’s odd,” said the vicar.

“Why is it odd?” Harold demanded eagerly.

“Well, I don’t know,” Mr. Wykeham answered rather lamely, feeling that he had been indiscreet. “I only mean that there was a man in Fenby hanging about Dr. Endicott’s place at the time—

a lanky, tall fellow, marked with small-pox. I forget his name, but I think he was an assistant to the doctor, or something of that kind."

"What makes you remember him?"

"Simply, I think, the fact that he came to your dear mother's funeral, Harold. I wondered a little, I remember, to see him there."

"And afterward——"

"I never saw him again. Endicott would probably know all about him."

"I will ask Dr. Endicott," said Harold.

CHAPTER XII.

ON EQUAL TERMS.

[T was not often now that Dr. Endicott entered his laboratory. He seemed to have taken a violent dislike to the place. Generally, therefore, it was shut up, seldom cleaned or put in order, and the creepers from outside had almost grown over the garden door. So thick was this growth, indeed, that Alice had once innocently remarked that the door would soon be entirely hidden, and that nobody would know that it was there; and was astonished by the start and sudden rush of color over her father's usually impassive face

that she then remarked. As a matter of fact, Dr. Endicott had been encouraging the growth of these plants for some time back, and had hoped that nobody would observe how thickly their branches were fastening up that hated door—the door through which Lilian's body had twice been carried—first from the churchyard, and thence to its last unhallowed resting-place in the doctor's garden; and he was somewhat annoyed when public notice was taken of his proceedings. Alice always knew instinctively when her father was vexed by anything that occurred, and although his vexation was sometimes inexplicable, she respected it. Nothing more was said about the creepers, therefore, and they grew on undisturbed.

It was on a Sunday evening—the Sunday after Harold's return, and during the pause for reflection which Dr. Endicott had decreed before he would give any answer to the young man's proposal—that the doctor felt impelled, by some curious chain of ideas, to walk into his workroom, as he sometimes called it, and to turn up the gas. The light flared with a blinding, yellow glare, and the flame hissed and sputtered as the doctor turned it to its full height. Having done this, he folded his arms, and looked round him. He had not been inside the room for months.

Dust lay thickly on the deal table,

and on the other scanty articles of furniture which stood by the walls. There were cobwebs in the corners ; a general air of neglect hung about the place. Stephen Endicott's mind was busy, however, with the past rather than with the present. He was thinking of the night when he, with Martin Dale, had prepared for a certain ghoul-like expedition, and when he had returned alone—bearing with him a burden which he had laid first upon that floor and then on the wooden table. He thought of the terror with which he realized the fact that Martin Dale had fled—terror followed by relief when he also found that Martin Dale did not come back again. For the secret of his life lay in this man's hand, and it was not a pleasant reflection for the successful and applauded physician, that at any moment—if indeed Martin Dale were still alive—the whole fabric of his fair reputation might be smitten and fall to the ground, while he became the target for arrows of never-ending shame.

Yes, shame ; for much as he told himself that he had been justified in extracting information from Lilian Crawford's dead body, he could not so easily acquit himself from blame with respect to the fate of her husband. True, he had killed him by sheer accident, by an unlucky blow struck only in

self-defense in a cause which all England would have condemned. In any other case, he told himself, he would boldly have faced the consequences of his deed, and acknowledged it to the world ; but how could he tell the world that he had been engaged in robbing a grave ? The grave, too, of a sweet, good woman, who had been his friend. Why, if he escaped the law, an English crowd would tear him to pieces for what they would call a vile piece of sacrilege and treachery ! He would have to surrender his position, live abroad, change his name. Alice's future would be blighted, and she perhaps would also look on him with horror. He could not face the contingency. No, he would keep his secret to the end, and Martin Dale would never trouble him again.

Thoughts such as these had drawn him to his old workroom. The proposal of Harold Crawford for Alice's hand had plunged him deep into memories which he would fain have blotted out. He had had three days in which to consider that proposal, and he was still undecided as to what he ought to do. Every fiber of good feeling and manliness within him revolted at the notion of marrying his daughter to the son of the man whom he had killed. Would it not be well to say to her : " No, this marriage is impossible ; it

shall never take place in my lifetime. I have a reason against it which I cannot tell to you." He knew that it would be well—that it was the only honest thing that he could do.

Stephen Endicott loved his daughter. He felt that it would wring his heart to see her cheek turn pale, her eyes grow dim with weeping, her voice lose its joyousness, her gait its elasticity ; and yet this pain would be in store for him if he uttered this decision. His quick eye had already seen the signs of Alice's love for Harold ; he knew her sensitive nature, and, although he believed that she would obey her father's command and give up her lover at his bidding, he foresaw her suffering, and shrank before it.

And yet—yet—was it not laid upon him to do this thing? Could he possibly let her marry Harold, knowing what he did? It would be to tear the last shred of honor from himself, if he sanctioned such a marriage.

As he came to this conclusion he moved a step forward and prepared, with a heavy sigh, to leave the room. At that very moment he heard a sound which startled him so much that his face turned ashy white, and his whole frame shivered as though he had been struck or stung. It was the sound of a low knock at the long-closed door.

Strange to say, he recollected the

knock. It was rather a peculiar one, accompanied by a slight scratching of the panel—a knock which had always been used by one man of Dr. Endicott's acquaintance, and only one. He himself had taught that knock to Martin Dale. When the assistant had important reason for disturbing his master in the laboratory he used that knock, and the doctor would give him entrance. But many years had passed away since Stephen Endicott had heard it last.

He stood motionless for a minute or two, trembling from head to foot. Then again he moved forward. Perhaps he had been mistaken. Perhaps he had only heard the tap of a loose branch, the rustling of an ivy leaf. Ah, no! there came the sound again. Either Martin Dale in the flesh, or Martin Dale's spirit, was knocking at the door.

In a moment he sprang to the gas-jet and turned it out. The unwelcome passer-by—if it were indeed a man—must have seen the light at the window and guessed that the room was tenanted. Then he stood still and listened. There was blank darkness now, except for the glimmering square that showed the window panes.

No knock came to the door. But instead of a knock there came a voice—the sound of which struck dismay to Dr. Endicott's heart.

“If you don't let me in, Dr. Endicott,

I'll batter the door down and rouse the house."

"Who are you?" said the doctor sternly.

"I am Martin Dale."

He knew it well enough. The perspiration stood upon his brow, and his hands were clammy and cold with fear, although his voice was calm.

"You cannot get in that way," he answered, approaching the door, and bending his mouth to the key-hole: "Go round to the library window, and I will let you in."

"Don't keep me waiting, then," was the reply, uttered with a sullen insolence which made Stephen Endicott's blood run cold. He heard the visitor's steps sounding on the graveled pathway, and wondered whether anyone else could hear.

In two minutes he was in the library, which possessed a long window opening to the ground. He opened it with a trembling hand, and found himself verily and in truth face to face with Martin Dale, who stepped jauntily into the room, as if he had a right to be there. The doctor closed the window and drew the curtain across it, stepped across the room and locked the door, then turned up the lamp and faced his visitor. "What do you want with me?" he said.

For a moment the two men looked at

each other in silence. They had never been alike, but the contrast was now intensified a thousand-fold. The unkempt, shabby, pockmarked, disreputable wanderer, with stooping shoulders and shambling gait, stood opposite a man of stately and noble presence, with a fine intellectual face and head, thoughtful eyes, and steady mouth—a man whose whole being seemed to express power and endurance, and whose environment was marked with all the signs of refinement and prosperity. Martin Dale looked him up and down with an expression of insolent scorn; then he glanced round the room, tossed his head up, and laughed aloud.

“What are you laughing at?” said the doctor, repressing a strong inclination to take the fellow by the throat and shake him as a terrier shakes a rat.

“I’m laughing at the world,” said Martin Dale. “Not at you, sir; oh, no! I admire you. I always admire cleverness and success. And if anyone has fooled the world nicely, it’s been you, Dr. Endicott—it’s been you.”

He rubbed his hands and shrugged his shoulders up to his ears in horrible mirth, while Stephen Endicott stood and looked at him—and wished him dead. But the doctor was a strong man, and would not show that he was afraid.

“I wonder,” he said coldly, “that you dare to come here. You are a

thief ; you stole from me before you left me, and I could put you in prison to-morrow, if I chose."

"Oh, that is the tone you are going to take ; is it?" said Dale, with infinite unconcern. "Then I'd advise you to drop it, Dr. Endicott. You and I know each other a trifle too well for that. I took only what I considered my rightful due, and the proper payment for that little bit of work in which I assisted."

He saw that the doctor winced in spite of himself.

"I don't think the world has ever been acquainted with the particulars of that transaction, has it?" he went on sneeringly. "What would become of your practice, your medical reputation, your good name, if I told the world that little story? You've been very clever ; you have gullied the world very well—but it lies in my hands now, I think, whether the world's to be gulled any longer."

"You go too far," said Stephen, in a hoarse, choked voice. "You forget with whom you have to deal. If you don't hold your tongue—one or other of us will not leave this room alive !"

His face was very pale, his eyes full of a dangerous gleam. He made an involuntary movement with his hands, as though to attack his enemy at once ; but Martin Dale was on his guard. His hand was in his pocket, and with one

swift gesture he showed what he carried there. It was a revolver.

"Loaded!" he said quietly. "Oh, I'm not such a fool as you think me, Dr. Endicott. I knew it was pretty well a matter of life and death before I came, and I provided accordingly. If you lift a hand to me, I'll use this. I learned how to handle it in the States, and I've no scruples about it, either. I could get away without anyone being the wiser, and leave you dead on your own hearth-rug."

Dr. Endicott was quite calm by the time this speech was ended. He even smiled a little, as he sat down at his desk.

"You have learned also how to bluster," he said gently. "That was not an accomplishment of yours in the old days, Martin. I don't fancy your aim would be very sure; your hand is not too steady, I see. Still, at close quarters I might have a poor chance against you."

"Very poor, indeed!" said Martin, sneering.

"Therefore I think it well to provide against emergencies." He removed his hand from a drawer into which he had plunged it, and suddenly placed a revolver on the desk before him, straightly poised in Martin Dale's direction. "I keep fire-arms as well as you," he went on easily. "My revolver is always

ready, and I have no more scruple about using it than you have. So you see that we are on equal terms, and we need have no more of this threatening nonsense. Now, tell me what you want."

Martin Dale stared at him, and then gradually let his eyes fall to the floor. "Well, you're a cool hand," he said slowly, "You were always clever. I always gave you credit for that. Well"—with a short, uneasy laugh—"let's talk things over, doctor. There's no need for violence on either side. If you'll put that six-shooter of yours into the drawer, I'll leave mine in my trouser pocket. That's fair, isn't it?"

The doctor removed the pistol from the desk, but placed it on the table beside him, ready to his hand. There it is," he said quietly. "Let us hope I shall not need to use it. Now, have the goodness to tell me at once, and as quickly as you can, why you are here."

Martin threw himself into an easy-chair, and looked gloomily at the doctor. "I've come here," he said, in a somewhat sulky tone, "for a very evident reason: because I want money."

"Yes, so I should suppose. But why do you come to me?"

"You want it put into words, do you? Well, because I possess a secret of yours, which I don't think you wish to see in the newspapers. Give me something to

make it worth my while for me to hold my tongue ; that is the long and the short of it."

"You are an insolent scoundrel," said Endicott, "and if it were not for old acquaintance' sake, I would at once kick you out of the house. You possess no secret of mine which has any marketable value."

"What?" said Martin Dale, with an indescribably malicious grin ; "does all the world know how you dug up Mrs. Crawford's grave on the night after the funeral, and got the body out of the coffin that you might dissect it? That's the way you got some of your knowledge ; some of the details that have made you famous, I'm sure of that ; but does the world know how you got them, I should like to hear?"

"The world has nothing to do with the way scientific men obtain knowledge. It must judge by results," said Dr. Endicott coldly. "Any knowledge I have obtained I used for the cure of disease. But you are mistaken in thinking I obtained that knowledge from an examination of Mrs. Crawford's body."

"You lie, Stephen Endicott, and you know you lie. Didn't I help you to exhume the body?"

"You helped me to make the attempt—which I have no desire to deny," said Dr. Endicott, looking him steadily in the face ; "but, as you know, we were inter-

rupted, and the attempt was never resumed."

Martin Dale rose to his feet. "Do you mean to tell me you—you gave it up?"

"We were interrupted," said Endicott, repeating his words mechanically, "and I gave it up. If you had not been such a coward as to run away you would have known that."

He gained courage as he saw the man's discomfiture. It was plain that Martin Dale had not been expecting him to receive his attack in this manner.

"The world is welcome," he continued, in his loftiest manner, "to know that I did once think of making that unfortunate attempt, entirely in the interests of science, but when we were interrupted I had not the heart to begin the work over again, and have very much regretted that first attempt."

"It would ruin your practice, if it were known," said Martin sullenly. "A doctor who digs up his patients' bodies for purposes of dissection—faugh!"

"It would have ruined it at the time, no doubt," said Dr. Endicott, with perfect serenity, "but it is far too firmly established now for any report of the kind to have an effect upon it. You are welcome to make the experiment, if you please."

"I'll take you at your word," said the man, "unless you make it worth my while to hold my tongue. Perhaps

young Crawford would like the information."

Dr. Endicott could not keep himself from paling, and Martin Dale saw the change.

"Yes, I should say he'd give me money for it, if you won't," he said coolly.

Endicott bit his lip. "If you tell him any such rubbish my only course will be to deny it," he said sharply. "A frustrated attempt of that kind counts as nothing."

"Ah! but was it frustrated? We might find that out!"

The doctor's features twitched for a moment, but he was not beaten yet.

"You'll get nothing out of me by this folly, Dale, and you know it. I don't mind giving you a sovereign now and then, if you are in difficulties, but only for old acquaintance' sake. You will get nothing by bluster and silly threats."

"Perhaps Mr. Harold Crawford will be more generous," said Dale.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOCTOR LIES.

FAR into the night the duel was prolonged. When dawn came, both combatants were exhausted, but unsubdued. Martin Dale had found the clew

to Dr. Endicott's motives; he had played upon the man's fears by repeated references to Harold, until he fancied that the game might possibly be altogether in his hands before long, if only he played his cards well enough. He did not understand the doctor's repeated statement that Dale might tell Harold what he chose respecting the attempt upon his mother's grave; he thought, in fact, that it was mere bravado, and that, if the point were urged sufficiently, the doctor would yield. He had not yet begun to associate Stephen Endicott with Harry Crawford's disappearance; no suspicion of the truth had dawned upon him. He had not known at the time that the dark figure which had risen up out of the dark night, and precipitated itself upon Dr. Endicott at the side of Lilian Crawford's grave, was that of Harry Crawford himself. He had fled too hurriedly to see the face. And his knowledge of the facts was not yet sufficiently minute to enable him to connect that struggle in the churchyard with the squire's subsequent disappearance.

With Stephen, the case was different. He had now one fear, and one fear only. He dreaded lest suspicion of having caused Harry Crawford's death should be directed against himself. He believed that he could deny the

charge of violating the grave, if ever the charge was made, but he dreaded above all things any questioning on the subject of Harry's death. He thought that if he held out against Martin Dale's attempt to blackmail him on the first score, he could obviate suspicion on the second.

"Well," Martin said at length, when the dawn of Monday morning broke into the curtained room, "you say I may do my worst, and you'll find that I shall. You'd better agree to my terms and let me go."

"Terms!" said the doctor contemptuously. "And what terms do you want, you scoundrel?"

"Keep a civil tongue in your head," said Martin, who was growing angry. "These are my terms. Give me three hundred a year for life, paid quarterly; and I'll go to America, or the ends of the earth, without wagging my tongue about any of your doings. But if you won't——"

"If I won't, what then?"

"Well, then," said the man doggedly, "I'll get the best price I can for my information elsewhere."

"You may go to the devil for all I care," said the doctor.

And then at last Martin Dale rose.

"I'm going down to the Rose in Bourneby," he remarked. "You may hear of me there any time you want me.

And I'll look in again before long. You'll find it to your interest to pension me off, doctor. I shall stick to you like a leech, if you don't."

And the doctor could well believe it. But he drew a long breath of relief when the man was safely off the premises; and then dropped his head between his hands and burst into bitter tears.

The die was cast. He could not allow his daughter to marry Harold Crawford. The truth might come to light any day. He was resolved against giving Dale the money for which he asked; and yet he felt that there was a possibility of his yielding the point. If, indeed, he could get Dale out of the country, would he not insure his own safety, and could he not then consent to his daughter's marriage with Harold?

But he was a man of keen mind and strong common sense, and these very characteristics urged him to be firm. If he once submitted to be blackmailed by Martin Dale, he felt that he would be guilty of fatal weakness. The man might turn on him at any moment, and prove, by the very fact of the doctor's payments, the doctor's guilt. He could not give way—let Martin Dale threaten as he chose. And he could not, under the circumstances, allow Alice to become Harold Crawford's wife.

In the course of the morning, as Dr. Endicott sat quietly in his study, Harold Crawford was announced. The young man noticed, as he came in, that the doctor looked pale and weary, and his heart misgave him as to the verdict that he was about to hear. Harold himself was dressed with extreme care and neatness, as became a lover who hoped that he had come to woo, and, in spite of an expression of anxiety upon his face, looked as handsome and manly a young fellow as anyone could desire for a son-in-law.

Dr. Endicott received him gravely, but not, as Harold thought, unkindly. He was therefore all the more taken aback when the doctor made known to him the fact that he refused, absolutely and decisively, his proposal for Alice's hand. Harold, who had been seated, sprang out of his chair, white with anguish, and, at first, positively dumb with dismay.

"But, Dr. Endicott," he stammered out at last, "she loves me."

"A girl's fancy, which will pass. Yours also will pass, Harold. I am sorry to pain you, but the more I reflect on the matter, the more I see that it is impossible for me to sanction any engagement."

"If we love each other, sir," said Harold, with spirit, "we shall be obliged to do without your sanction."

"Do you defy my authority?"

"Not when it is rightly and wisely exercised; but surely, sir, in this case you will change your decision."

"Never!"

"But you will tell me your reasons? At least let me hear them," cried Harold passionately, "that I may combat them and put your objections to flight. Have you heard anything against me?"

"No, Harold, nothing." The doctor's voice was almost tender in its note of regret.

"You know of my circumstances—are they not such as to warrant me in asking a woman to be my wife?"

"Perfectly."

"Then why, sir, why——"

The doctor looked at him compassionately. "You had better accept my decision without questioning it, Harold," he said. "I am truly sorry, but I cannot do otherwise."

"Only tell me why."

"For one reason," said Stephen Endicott slowly, "you will place me in the awkward position of seeming to have thrown my daughter in your way. If I give her to you, I shall appear the most dishonorable of men. I will not submit to be placed in that position."

Harold's eyes suddenly blazed.

"Do you mean," he asked sternly, "that you will separate Alice and myself

for the sake of your own reputation? That would be cruel, and—permit me to say so—also absurd.”

“There is another reason,” said Stephen, frowning darkly, “but it is one which I do not wish to give.”

“You must give it me. I refuse to be bound by your wishes unless I am convinced—and I shall never be convinced—that it is my duty to give her up.”

He began impetuously, but ended with a quiver of the voice that went to Endicott’s heart. The man moved uneasily in his chair, sighed, and looked through the window—at Lilian’s grave.

“My dear Harold,” he said at length, in an unusually gentle tone, “I have the greatest reluctance to pain you. I would to God that you had never seen my daughter—never fallen in love with her. If I had thought that possible, I should have left Fenby long ago. But I was selfish enough to think only of my own convenience, and Alice has hitherto seemed to me such a child that I never dreamed of taking steps to remove her out of harm’s way. I think you know me well enough to believe that I am sincere in saying all this to you?”

“Yes, of course; I know that you mean it, sir, but I don’t see why—I can’t see why you should not give her to me. I swear I would make her life happy.”

"I believe you would—as far as it lay in your power. Ask me no more, Harold; I shall only add to your unhappiness, if I go on."

"I must know why you refuse," the young man persisted. He was haggardly pale; he began to see that Dr. Endicott's decision was final, and that no pleadings would avail to move him.

"I would do anything in my power—that I thought right—to add to your happiness," said the doctor, with one hand pressed on his brow so as to shade his downcast eyes from Harold's too penetrating gaze. "I have never forgotten that your father was my friend, and that he once begged me to be a friend to you in case you wanted friendship. Harold, if there were anything else in the world that you wanted which I could give I would give it, but not my daughter."

"Why?"

"Because, my dear lad, you bear in your constitution the seeds of that deadly disease of which your mother died; and even if you, by good fortune, escape it, you will leave it as a legacy to your children after you. Disease, or madness, or early death—it is difficult to say which might not be their fate. It is your plain duty not to marry at all—to let your race die out; and I should be false to all my scientific beliefs if for

one moment I tolerated the idea of your marrying my daughter.”

He spoke with great emphasis, great intensity, and wiped the drops of perspiration from his brow when he had done speaking. To Harold it seemed as if this emotion proceeded from his great sorrow for the statement he had been called upon to make, and sympathy for the young man in such a trying moment. But there was something more than sorrow or sympathy in the doctor's mind. There was a depth of bitter shame and remorse which stopped short only of repentance and amendment. He hated himself for what he was doing, but could not resolve to abase himself and tell the truth.

Harold staggered, as if under the weight of a crushing blow, and uttered a cry like that of a wounded animal—so expressive of agony that Dr. Endicott turned pale when he heard it. He rose from his chair.

“Harold, my dear fellow, I cannot tell you how grieved I am. If I could have spared you I would—but I could not—I could not. For Alice's sake!”

Then he stopped short: the ruin he had caused, the downfall of the young man's hopes, the sorrow that he was bringing to his daughter's heart, all pressed upon him and suddenly checked his tongue. But he strengthened himself in the obstinacy of his resolve.

After all, what did it matter? He must have a weapon with which to fight these headstrong young people, and he used the readiest to his hand—his own scientific knowledge. No harm, he said to himself, would be done. Young men were not usually disposed to deny themselves the luxury of marriage because of any hereditary predisposition to disease. In a few months Harold would marry some other girl, and deride the doctor's warning; and Alice would be safe.

"Is it—is it true?" the young man gasped.

"Only too true," said Stephen Endicott.

Harold sat down, leaned his elbows on the table, and covered his face with his hands for a few moments in absolute silence. He breathed heavily, but showed no other sign of emotion. Dr. Endicott regarded him with a curious mixture of sorrow and respect. Silence, when a man was deeply wounded, struck him as a thing to be admired. He had been silent himself so long!

The young man lifted up his face at last. It was very pale, and the features were tense and rigid with emotion, but his voice was perfectly composed.

"I thank you, Dr. Endicott," he said. "Now I understand—and I yield. It would be wrong, as you say, for me to marry; and I cannot—could

not—expect you to give Alice to me. I withdraw my—my proposal.”

Dr. Endicott listened and bowed his head. “I expected you to say no less,” he said quietly. “You are too generous to do anything else.”

“You will explain it to her, will you not?” poor Harold entreated. “I cannot bear to see her again—I think it would be better for me to go away.”

“Yes, perhaps it would,” said the doctor. “Travel for a while, and you will forget.”

“I shall never forget. Thank you, sir, for all your kindness. I—I understand now,” said the lad, almost choking in his effort after self-control. “I see that it is impossible. I’ll go away; you shall not be troubled with me again. Tell Alice I will never forget her, but that she must not think of me.” And then he turned away, after wringing Dr. Endicott’s hand with more energy than he knew.

“Poor boy!” the doctor sighed, as he looked after him. “I would willingly have made his life a happy one. But I will not let him marry Alice. He shall be saved from that, at any rate.”

He shut himself up in the study again, and had his lunch brought to him there. He could not bear—all at once—to encounter his daughter’s pleading eyes. He had not dared to speak to her of

Harold until the decision against him had been made irrevocable. He had felt that it was possible for her—and for her alone—to make him waver in what he had resolved to do.

But toward evening Alice crept into his study and knelt down beside him, leaning her fair head on his shoulder, and he knew what she had come to ask. But at first he did not speak.

“Well, dear?” he said, at length.

“Father—Harold has been here.”

“Yes, my darling.”

“I thought he would come to me—afterward.”

There was a moment's pause, before Dr. Endicott said, almost harshly:

“I sent him away. He will not come again.”

“Father!”

There was a world of reproach in the utterance of his name. The doctor shivered slightly, and put her clinging hand away from him.

“You are not going to be a disobedient daughter, I trust, Alice? You will obey me?”

“Yes—oh, yes, father; but—but I love Harold—too.”

“My child, he—he is not worthy of your love.”

This was what he had resolved to say to her. He could sever these two young, pure hearts only by guile.

“I do not mean that there is any—

thing very—morally wrong. But he is not in a fit state of health and brain to marry. There are disease and madness in his family, Alice. It would be very wrong if I gave you to him, and I absolutely refuse to do it. My dear, you must accept my judgment.

“But father—poor Harold!”

“Harold knows my decision, and accepts it. He owns that I am right, and bade me say farewell to you from him. My child must be brave. It would not be right for you to marry him; say that to yourself over and over again, and it will strengthen you. My darling, you will try to be brave?”

She was crying quietly, but there was no resentment in her tone as she spoke.

“Father, must it be so? Is there no way?”

“None, Alice. I would sooner see you in your grave than married to Harold Crawford.”

And from the decision of his tone Alice knew, as Harold also knew, that appeal was impossible. She said no more; she clung closer to her father, and wept upon his shoulder; but her heart was filled with a great yearning of tenderness for the lover who had left her, at the dictates of duty, without even a look, a kiss, a last good-by.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGER IN THE LAND.

“YOU must go away, my dear boy,” said the vicar tenderly.

Harold sat in the vicarage study, his head drooping, his hands clasping one knee. There was a look of despondency upon his face which Mr. Wykeham did not like to see.

“I may go—by and by,” said the young man drearily. “But it does not seem much use, does it? There is no place I care to go to, now.”

“But that will pass, I trust.”

“Why should it pass?” Harold asked, almost angrily. “Do you think I shall forget—forget the woman I love? Forget that I am doomed to be a lonely, childless man all the days of my life? Forget that the old house will have to pass into the hands of strangers, because I shall have no son to bear my name? These are things that are not so easy to forget. They are enough to last me all my life, I fancy.”

“It is a hard sentence, I know,” said the vicar seriously. “But I should not take it as an irrevocable one. Consult other doctors. Endicott was always a faddist on certain matters of health and disease. You must not go exactly by what he says.”

"He will never think otherwise," said Harold. "He will never give me his daughter. That shows his opinion, does it not? I have no need to consult other doctors; he would give me Alice, if he had any hope for me."

"I cannot understand it," said Mr. Wykeham, in a meditative tone. "I should have thought that the matter would have been mentioned earlier, if Endicott had come to the conclusion before your poor mother died. I never heard a hint of any such thing before. It is inexplicable."

"Why inexplicable? It seems to me easy enough to understand."

"He ought to have told you before. I should like, if you do not object, Harold, to have a word with him upon the subject. I am not your legal guardian, you know, but I have taken as much interest in you, I think, as though I were——"

"Far more," said Harold, looking up with eyes that suddenly grew moist. "Far more than Stephen Endicott ever did, although he called himself my father's friend."

The vicar remained silent and meditative for some time after the young man had quitted him, and when he rose, it was with an air of resolution which was not often seen upon his placid face. He took his hat and stick, and made his way, without further hesitation, to the

Manor House, where he was shown at once into the library. Dr. Endicott rose from his chair to receive him, and threw a more than customary friendliness into his greeting.

"I half expected you," he said, with a little smile. "That was why you were shown in here at once. I thought the poor lad would fly to you in his trouble."

The vicar was half disarmed. "I am very sorry to hear what you have been saying to poor Hal," he said, as he took a chair.

"You could not be more sorry than I was to say it," the doctor rejoined; and there was a look of distress upon his face which struck the vicar as undoubtedly genuine. "It gave me great pain, I can assure you."

"That may well be, Endicott," said Mr. Wykeham, assuming his judicial air. "And you are no doubt right to stick to your principles and refuse to give Alice to a man of unsound constitution—if you are sure that it is so."

"Should I have inflicted so much upon him, and upon my daughter, if it were not so?"

"Surely you'll grant the possibility of a mistake."

"Not in this case," said the doctor coldly. "Permit me, Wykeham: science does not make mistakes."

"I should have thought it made a

good many," answered the vicar. "How can you be sure?"

"If you knew anything of diagnosis, and had understood the late Mrs. Crawford's disease as well as I did," said Dr. Endicott, "you would understand that there is no doubt as to Harold's predisposition to the complaint from which she died. Of course it may never develop—but again, it may, and I am resolved against exposing my daughter to the risk of witnessing such suffering, and my possible grandchildren to the risk of inheriting it. I have made this disease my specialty, as you know, and I have come to dread its inroads unspeakably. Only a professional man like myself can estimate the suffering that it causes."

"Well, you may be right in your decision as regards Alice's destiny," said the vicar, a little uneasily, "but it is not only of Alice that I want to speak. You are Harold's guardian. Do you think you have treated Harold rightly?"

"I am Harold's guardian—and your parishioner, I suppose," said the doctor, with some stiffness; "but I am not aware that my guardianship of Harold is one of those spiritual matters in which a clergyman has a right to intervene."

"Oh, if you are going to take it in that way, I can but depart," said the vicar, with a touch of resentment,

which speedily lost itself, however, in gentler remonstrance. "Come, Endicott, we have known each other for a good number of years. You should not be so ready to take offense. We are both interested in that poor lad—and his father was one of your oldest friends."

Dr. Endicott moved in his chair with some impatience, as it seemed to the vicar; but he answered mildly:

"You are quite right, Wykeham, and I beg your pardon. I have been upset about this affair, and I suppose that my temper is affected. You must not think too hardly of me for a touch of irritability."

"Say no more, say no more, my dear fellow," said the vicar, with real feeling, and he put out his hand tentatively as if to grasp that of the doctor. But Endicott did not seem to see it, and he drew it back again. "I quite understand that you have been placed in a very painful position. But—it is painful for Harold also."

"Of course. Naturally that made part of the pain for me," said Dr. Endicott, in a strange, strained voice which caused Mr. Wykeham to look at him with sympathy. "But what do you mean by saying that I have not treated him rightly in this matter?"

"Well," said the vicar deliberately, "I think that, if you had come to the

conclusion some time ago, you ought to have told him before, and not sprung it upon him in the very crisis of his life."

"If I came to this conclusion some time ago?" exclaimed the doctor. "Of course I came to that conclusion long ago—ever since his mother's death."

"Then you ought to have spoken before," said Mr. Wykeham, rather severely.

There was a little pause. Dr. Endicott sat with his eyes fixed upon his desk, and his face contracted as if from pain. The vicar looked at him keenly.

"I was reluctant to give him pain sooner than necessary," said the doctor at last, in a low tone.

"But you have given him far greater pain in the end," said the vicar, rather hotly. "Surely it would have been better to talk to him quietly and seriously before he went to college, or at least before he went abroad—not to wait until he had fallen in love with your own daughter! Really, Endicott, it does seem to me that you have mismanaged the matter, and have arranged it so as to give him as much pain as possible. I cannot help saying so, and if I offend you I cannot help it. Why, you never mentioned the thing even to me!"

"What was the good of talking over unpleasant details?" said Dr. Endicott, with a frown. "I knew it, of course—every doctor would have known it—but

we don't go about the world telling people of our patients' cases. I meant to speak to Harold when he came home this time—I had no idea that he meant to make a fool of himself over Alice at his age—why, he is a mere boy still!”

“Nay, not such a boy. But a good deal of this pain and unpleasantness might have been avoided, Endicott. I'm sure of that. And I can't help telling you so. I could not rest until I had freed my mind.”

“So it seems,” said the doctor, with rather sarcastic emphasis. “But there is very little use in weeping over spilt milk, Wykeham. I am sorry that things have turned out in this way, but it can't be helped.”

“And you hold out no hope for the young people?”

“Certainly not. I would sooner see Alice dead and buried than Harold Crawford's wife.”

“You speak strongly, Endicott. I am not at all sure that you are right.”

“Can I help that?” said the doctor sharply. Then, more quietly: “I beg your pardon, Wykeham. I can't speak of the matter with perfect calm. Perhaps we had better not discuss it.”

“Perhaps not,” said the vicar, in a saddened tone. “I am extremely sorry for Harold—and for Alice, too, that is all. I hope—if you will allow me to ask—that Alice does not feel it much?”

“A silly girl’s fancy. She will get over it. Don’t encourage her in talking about it, please. She will no doubt go to your wife for sympathy, as Harold has gone to you. Say a word to Mrs. Wykeham on the subject for me.”

The vicar nodded, and rose to go. He was not satisfied with the result of his conversation with Dr. Endicott, and yet he could not put his dissatisfaction into words. The more he thought of the matter, the more he thought it extraordinary that the objection to Harold on the score of health should have been brought forward at this juncture. He could not help a suspicion that there was some other reason for his dismissal, and that there was less cause for Harold’s despondency than he imagined. But what it was that roused this suspicion in him he could not say. Nothing that Dr. Endicott actually said was to blame—yet something—something—the vicar could not think what—something in his voice, or manner, or expression, had given rise to this suspicion on the vicar’s part, and it made him extremely uncomfortable.

He would have liked to see Alice, but was reluctant to ask for her after what her father had said. He took his leave, therefore, and walked away, with signs of unusual care and anxiety upon his brow.

He went down the lane on his way

to the village, and encountered Harold near the churchyard gate.

"Was it any good?" the young man asked wistfully.

"I'm afraid not, Harold, my boy. I'm afraid not."

"I wonder if it would make any difference if I went to some big London doctor, and asked him."

"No difference to Endicott, I'm afraid, Harold. You had better try to put the idea out of your head, and go away for a bit."

"Perhaps I had. But I don't want to go yet," said Hal, hanging his head sorrowfully. "I want to see if there is anything else to be done—about my poor father's death——"

The vicar shook his head. "My poor boy, both your aims are vain ones, I am afraid. Best to forget the past."

"I am to forget the past, and give up all hope for the future, am I?" said Harold bitterly. "It does not seem to me that life is worth living, at this rate."

The vicar was about to utter a remonstrance, when his attention was diverted from the subject in hand. A man had come slouching up the lane, and Mr. Wykeham's eyes had fallen on his face, with the result that he forgot what he had been going to say.

"Why," he said suddenly, "surely I know that face!"

Harold looked up, and recognized the man whose enigmatical remarks had excited his curiosity a few days before.

"Who is it?" he said quickly.

The man seemed to wish to escape remark. He lowered his head, turned his face, and seemed inclined to slink into the hedge when the vicar turned and addressed him.

"Have I not seen you before in the neighborhood?" he asked.

"You may have done; I'm sure I can't tell," was the answer in a semi-sullen, semi-insolent tone.

"Have the goodness to stop for a moment," said the vicar, who was accustomed to exercise a sort of parental authority over residents and visitors alike in the village of Fenby. "You are not a native of this village, are you?"

"No," the man answered; "I am not."

"When were you here before?"

"Have you any reason for asking me these questions?" said the stranger, lifting his head, with a sudden fierceness in his sunken, disagreeable-looking eyes. "I am not accustomed to be questioned in this way."

Here Harold interposed, in the benevolent hope of throwing oil upon the troubled waters. "You mistake, my good man," he said. "The vicar does not ask questions out of idle curiosity,

but only in order to know whether he can help you or not."

"I have not asked for help," the man replied, with an unpleasant laugh. "And as far as I understand, I am more likely to be able to help Mr. Harold Crawford than the vicar to help me."

"You said something of this kind before," said Harold impulsively. "What do you mean?"

"That's my secret, sir. If ever you want to possess yourself of it, you will have to pay my price—that's all."

"And what is your price?"

"That I haven't decided. I may perhaps let you know when I want to sell it."

And, with a laugh, the man slouched off, making his way up the lane to the gate which led to the house of Dr. Endicott.

"What an insolent fellow!" cried the vicar.

"He is going to the doctor's," Harold murmured thoughtfully. "I wish I knew his name."

"Wait a moment," said Mr. Wykeham briskly. "I mentioned this man to you before, and I know where I saw him now. He was staying with the doctor as his assistant just about the time of your mother's death. I suppose you won't remember Jane Sparks, who was housemaid at the Manor House

about that time? She married Perkins, at the lodge. It is quite possible that she may remember his name, which I have forgotten."

"Let us go and ask her at once. I am interested in that man. He seems to know something about my father which we do not, sir. I wish we could bring him to book."

"The only way to do that might be to have him arrested as a vagrant," said Mr. Wykeham dryly. "But here we are at Mrs. Perkins'. Good evening, Jane; how are you to-night?"

Jane Perkins was a comely, rosy-cheeked, black-eyed dame, who had grown buxom since the days when she was housemaid at Dr. Endicott's. She smiled broadly and courtesied low as the gentlemen approached, and invited them with great *empressement* into her best parlor, which was very close and stuffy, and filled with shining mahogany furniture.

"We have come to ask you a question, Mrs. Perkins," said the vicar pleasantly; "and I am sure that you will answer it to the best of your ability."

Mrs. Perkins courtesied still, with her hands folded in her apron, and expressed her desire to do her best.

"You were at the Manor House, as housemaid, before you married?"

"Yes, sir, I was."

"You were there at the time of a very sad occurrence at the Hall, when Mrs. Crawford died?"

"Yes, sir, I was," said Mrs. Perkins, composing her face into an expression of decent solemnity.

"Do you remember anyone staying at Dr. Endicott's about that time?"

"No, sir, I don't. At least—wait a moment. Do you mean regular visitors, sir, or anybody at all? For there was a young man that used to come and go every now and then; and he, as I remember, was there just at that time. There on the day of the late Mrs. Crawford's funeral, I think he was."

"That may be the man I mean," said the vicar quickly. "Who was he?"

"Well, sir, he was a sort of assistant to the doctor, I believe. Not a gentleman, you know."

"Not a handsome man, either, was he?" said the vicar, smiling.

"The ugliest brute I ever set eyes on," exclaimed Mrs. Perkins energetically, "begging your pardon, sir, for saying so. Cross-eyed, and pale, and pockmarked; a regular bad-looking sort of chap, that you wouldn't trust with a brass farthing, not further than you could see. He'd been the doctor's errand-boy, once upon a time, so I've heard say, and had risen to be a sort of assistant in his workshop, or whatever it was. It used to make my blood run

cold whenever he touched little Miss Alice, for people used to say as he helped the doctor—I dare say it was all rubbish, you know, sir—to cut up dead bodies and that sort of thing. Which I could easily believe of Martin Dale, but never of a fine man like the doctor.”

“Martin Dale! Yes, that was the name I once heard,” said Mr. Wykeham, with a flash of returning memory. “Harold, that was the very man. Why, what’s the matter, man?”

For Harold had turned white. There was a ghoul-like suggestiveness in Mrs. Perkins’ reference to the dissecting room which had suddenly made him feel faint and sick—he did not quite know why.

CHAPTER XV.

MARTIN DALE'S STORY.

FOR the next few days it seemed as though Martin Dale had disappeared from Fenby altogether. The vicar and Harold both looked for him, and made inquiries as to his whereabouts, but nothing could be seen or heard of him. It must be allowed that Harold’s inquiries were somewhat languid. He was a little too much absorbed by his own affairs to be energetic in anything

else just then. It was impossible for him to help brooding over the downfall of his hopes, the doom which seemed to hang over him. He thought once or twice of carrying out the vicar's suggestion, and of going to London to consult another physician as to his health and the chances of his having inherited his mother's disease; but the reflection that another medical opinion would have no effect upon Dr. Endicott's decision deterred him. By and by, he thought, he would go; but at present—where was the use?

Again the vicar urged him to go abroad. But he had still two reasons for remaining in England—and at Fenby. He was not quite satisfied that all had been done that ought to be done with respect to his father's disappearance—that was the first thing. Secondly, he was anxious about Alice, who was reported to be ill. She did not come to church; she was not seen about the lanes, or the village, or the churchyard—her favorite haunts; and the servants shook their heads mysteriously when asked after her welfare. Even Mrs. Wykeham, warned by her husband to say as little as possible, looked uncomfortable when Harold mentioned her, and could only reply that she was sure Alice would receive every possible care and attention from her father.

And if care and attention could have done Alice good, she would speedily have recovered from her indisposition, such as it was. Stephen Endicott lavished more tenderness upon his daughter at this time than he had ever shown before; he spent as much of his leisure with her as was possible; he brought her beautiful presents from London; he tempted her appetite with the rarest fruit, the choicest delicacies; he did everything, in short, but give her the desire of her heart, which alone would have satisfied her and made her well.

Alice did her best to respond. She was not rebellious, not ungrateful. But she had been robbed of the sweetest hope that ever comes to a woman's heart, and she was as one who had received a deadly hurt. It was no use to pretend that she did not care. She did care; every fiber of her being cried out that she cared, and in the struggle for fortitude and submission, her physical strength ebbed away, as the blood ebbs from an open wound.

"It was necessary, my child—you cannot know how necessary it was," her father pleaded with her one evening, at the twilight hour. She was lying on a sofa, and he had come to her side and knelt down beside her, and put his arms about her as he tried to soften the harshness of his decree to her ears. "If I could have prevented

it, I would—you know I would; but I cannot help it."

"Father, dear, I know you would. Only sometimes I feel——"

"Well, my darling."

"As if you had separated me from Harold only because you were afraid of my having to suffer pain for his sake by and by—supposing that he were ill, you know, as you think he may be; and I wanted to tell you that I would rather have that kind of suffering than this. Because—if he were ill, you know—would it make things any better that I could not go to him and nurse him and comfort him? I would rather do that and—bear the suffering——"

"I know, I know, my dearest child. It is like you to say so. But I am acting as I think right—not only for you, but for the race. It is hard sometimes to bear; but we must sacrifice our individual lives when necessary for the good of society, for the good of the human race; and you are called on to do this. Because, if you had children, Alice, they also might inherit and transmit this terrible disease—do you not see?"

"Yes, I see," she answered drearily, "and I suppose you are right, but it is so hard to bear." She hid her face upon his arm with a burst of silent tears, and the doctor pressed her to him closely, feeling a terrible pang of remorse for the wrong that he was doing

and had done. But what other path, he said to himself, could he take?

"Will you promise me something, father?" Alice asked at length, raising her sweet, tear-stained face from his encircling arm.

"If I can, my darling."

"If Harold should ever be taken ill with that dreadful complaint, will you let me go to him then and nurse him?"

"My dear Alice, it may be in the system, and never develop itself for the next twenty years—or more. I know of a man who developed an hereditary disease after he was seventy years of age."

"That does not matter. Promise me, dear father, that you will put no obstacle in the way, if it is possible in other respects."

"Well, if it is possible in other respects, and you still wish it," said Dr. Endicott reluctantly, "I promise you that I will not object."

He thought the promise a foolish and futile one, but if it tranquilized the girl's mind he would not refuse to give it.

She certainly seemed quieter and more contented after this. Only she could not eat nor sleep. She had lost interest in life; and every day she grew thinner and paler and weaker, as if her vitality grew less and less and would finally fail her altogether. Stephen Endicott's heart was wrung by a terrible

fear. If the reason which he gave for separating the lovers had been the real reason, he would have surrendered unconditionally. But unfortunately there was another reason, of a more deadly kind. He could not let Alice marry the son of Harry and Lilian Crawford without confessing the truth.

And if he confessed the truth, the probability was that Harold would not look at her again. What use then to ruin himself by confession, if that confession would not bring about the child's happiness? Yet how could he bear to see his child die before his eyes, knowing, too, how cruel he must appear to her. It was an *impasse*, out of which he could not see his way.

Meanwhile, Harold hung about his own garden and grounds almost as much dejected and out of sorts as Alice herself. But he was destined to receive an impetus, a stimulus to action, of which Alice would be the last to dream.

He was leaning over a fence and looking at the blue hills on the distant horizon, when he heard a step beside him. Looking up, he saw the shabby stranger for whom he had been searching during the past few days, in the desultory way for which he made excuse to himself by the thought of his own trouble; and, although he rather prided himself on his self-possession as a general thing, he could not help starting at this sudden

appearance. The man took instant advantage of the momentary pause to say:

"I've heard that you wanted me, Mr. Crawford. I don't know what for, but here I am, and you can make the best of me."

"Your name is Martin Dale, I think?" said Harold, retaliating as best he could.

"Yes, it is," said the man, with a furtive glance at him, and something of a scowl, "though how you came to know it——"

"How I came to know it is nothing to the point," said Harold coolly. "I do know it, and that is enough. You wish to speak to me, do you? Then you had better come up to the house."

The man hesitated and looked keenly at the young squire. "Honor bright!" he said, with a somewhat awkward laugh. "You don't mean to detain me against my will? I'll tell you, to begin with, I won't have anything to do with the parson or the doctor, and if you face me with them I shall be dumb. I'll deal with you, if with anyone, and with no one else."

"All right," said Harold impatiently. "I would rather see you alone. There's neither doctor, nor parson, nor policeman concealed about my premises. You are free to come and go as you please. No one will hinder you."

"You promise that," the stranger said, looking at him suspiciously.

"You give me your word—your word of honor—that, when we have had our conversation, you'll let me go as I came?"

It was Hal's turn to hesitate. The insistence with which Martin Dale urged his request showed that he attached great importance to it. This was in itself a matter to excite suspicion.

"You needn't think I'm guilty of a murder, or anything of that kind," said Dale, with a sneering laugh, "nor that I want to run away from the place. I'll promise, in my turn, to go back to my lodgings in the village and stay there for a week. That's fair, isn't it? Only I want you to promise me, as I said before, that you'll let me go to-day as I came."

Harold shrugged his shoulders a trifle contemptuously. "As you please. I don't suppose that I shall have the slightest desire to detain you. Are you coming up to the house or not?"

"Oh, yes, I'm coming," said the man. "Lead on, young gentleman. It's your turn to lead now. But perhaps I can tell you a thing or two that even you haven't been aware of till now."

Harold hardly noticed the words. He strode back to the house, and led the way, without speaking, to the library. Here he motioned the visitor to a seat; but he himself did not sit down. He

leaned against the mantelpiece, and occasionally took a turn or two up and down the hearthrug; but it did not seem to him possible to settle down and look magisterial in an armchair, as an older man would probably have done. Martin Dale, sitting at a respectful distance from him, smiled to himself at the young proprietor's want of self-command.

"Well," said Harold at last, rather sharply, "what is it you wish to say?"

"I? It was not I who was looking for you, sir, but you who were looking for me, if you remember. I was under the impression that you had a question to ask me," Martin answered, in oily tones.

"Well, I have a question," said Harold, facing him. "You led me to think the other day that you knew something of my father's disappearance. What do you know?"

"That is not a question that's easily answered. I know something that only one person besides myself knows, and which I have often thought, Mr. Harold, that you ought to know. But I don't part with valuable information for nothing."

"What do you want? Five pounds?" said Harold bluntly.

"Say five times as much to begin with, sir, and we'll see how much the rest is worth to you."

Harold hesitated. But he was young,

impatient, and he had plenty of money. He went to his desk, and wrote a check for twenty-five pounds. But he did not hand it at once to Martin Dale, whose covetous eyes rested on it with a sort of affectionate satisfaction. He fluttered it lightly between his fingers, letting the man read the amount and the signature.

"Now," he said, "you see I am ready to pay your price for your information, if it is really of any value. But you must give me some idea of its value first. When I am convinced that it is worth having, I will give you the check."

"Confound your caution!" muttered Dale to himself. But he looked at Harold's firm lips and clear eyes, and did not dare to say it quite aloud. "Well, I'll begin my story," he said sullenly, after a moment's pause, "and you may see for yourself. Can't you give one a drop of whisky to clear one's throat before one begins to talk?"

Harold silently rang the bell, and, to the great surprise of the servant who appeared, ordered whisky and soda-water. "Now, sir," he said sternly, when these refreshments were placed on the table at Martin Dale's elbow, "will you have the goodness to go on?"

The man poured himself out half a glass of whisky and mixed a very little soda-water with it before he replied. There was a vague insolence in his

manner which Harold resented, but did not quite know how to repress.

"Well, sir," he began at last, "you needn't blame me for what I'm going to tell you. You must remember that I was only a paid servant, bound to do what I was told, and though I undertook certain commissions and offices, yet it was not of my own free will, and I am not legally responsible. The doctor always said that himself. 'Martin,' he said, 'you are not legally responsible: the responsibility rests with me.'"

"The doctor! What doctor?"

"Why, your friend and guardian, Dr. Endicott, of course. A nice friend he's been to you, I can tell you. And a nice friend to your father and—to your mother, too."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Stephen Endicott is a man with no heart, no bowels of mercy; that he does not care who's sacrificed, so long as he gets his ends. A few years ago he set his heart upon making certain experiments complete; he had a theory that he wanted to prove; and he said that it must be proved for the sake of humanity. It was not for the sake of humanity at all; it was for his own sake, and his own reputation. And for that, he would have sacrificed his dearest friend—did sacrifice him, for aught I know; it looks like it."

"Come to the point," said Harold

dryly. His pulses were beating like sledge hammers; he could not imagine what he was to hear next. Alice's father—ought he to listen to accusations against him?—and yet, when his own parents were concerned, was it not his duty to hear? He steeled himself to show no trace of emotion, and said only:

“Go on.”

“You will remember, no doubt,” said Dale, with a sly glance at him, “that when Dr. Endicott first came to Fenby, it was in order to see your mother, Mrs. Crawford, at your father's express desire. The doctor was just beginning to be known as a specialist in the disease from which your mother was supposed to suffer; and he had a theory about the cure of this disease which just then he was particularly anxious to prove; but he had never found a case on which he could experiment. He experimented on her.”

“Did my father know this?”

“Yes, as much as he knew anything. He wasn't very quick to take anything up—your father. But he gave Dr. Endicott permission to do what he liked; and the doctor was finely exultant about it. ‘The best case I ever saw, Dale,’ he said to me. ‘If I cure her, my theory will be quite sufficiently tested, and I shall publish the result.’ He was so anxious about it that he gave up his summer holiday, and settled

down here with little Miss Alice—you'll remember that, although it is a good many years ago?"

"Yes," said Harold slowly. He also remembered that he had always believed his action to have been one of pure friendliness and kindly feeling on Dr. Endicott's part. Now it appeared that it had been performed for his own benefit simply.

"Well, he attended her for some time, and Mrs. Crawford steadily improved. He said to me one day, with a look of perfect triumph: 'I've done it, Dale; the experiment is successful'—or words to that effect. He said, 'I shall publish my notes of the case, and the theories I have formed will be proved correct in every detail. I never had a better chance,' he said. And it was just after that that there came the news of Mrs. Crawford's death. I never saw Dr. Endicott so put about in the whole of the time I knew him, as I did just then."

"For the sake of his own reputation! I understand," said Harold bitterly.

"What else should it be for? He is not the man to care for his friends, unless they can help him to something that he desires. He cared nothing for your father or for your mother—least of all for you. Whether he cares for his daughter or not, God knows."

Harold turned away. He believed

that Dr. Endicott did care for his daughter, but he could not say so just then.

"Yes, he was very much put about," said Martin Dale reflectively. "He thought that all his trouble was thrown away. He thought that he could never get just such a typical case again. The only thing that remained to him was to try a *post-mortem* examination." Harold started slightly. "The cure seemed to be complete, but, as the patient was dead, the only way of ascertaining the fact of cure was by the dissecting knife."

"It was not allowed!" cried Harold angrily.

"It was mentioned to your father," said Dale, "and he flew into a tremendous rage at the very suggestion. The idea of having his wife's body cut into after death seemed repulsive to him—as I've noticed it does appear to many men. You share the feeling yourself, if I am not mistaken. Speaking for myself, I may say that personally I have got over any feeling of that kind, altogether."

"No doubt. Go on, sir!"

"Again Dr. Endicott was plunged into the depths of despair," said Martin deliberately. "He remonstrated in vain with your father. They had a deadly quarrel on the subject, I believe. The doctor poured out his story to me,

as he would do now and then when he had nobody else to talk to. And then the idea occurred to us that, in that lonely spot, it would be perfectly easy to exhume the body of Mrs. Crawford by night, examine it at our leisure, and afterward restore it to the grave."

"And you did this?" said Harold, his eyes aflame.

"Softly, sir, softly! Whether we did or not is the critical point of my story. Would you like to know the end? Then hand me over that little slip of paper with your signature attached, if at least you think my information of any nature of interest."

Harold handed him the check without a moment's hesitation, then sat down at the desk and waited for the end of the story.

CHAPTER XVI.

"HOLD YOUR TONGUE!"

"I DID my master's bidding," said Martin Dale softly, as he transferred the check to his pocket-book, with an air of chastened satisfaction. "He told me to procure tools for the purpose, and I did so. I was bound to obey him, Mr. Crawford. He had given me my education for nothing, and

I had lived with him as his assistant for quite a number of years. I could do nothing less."

"Don't apologize for what you did; go on," said Harold sternly. The visitor hastened to obey.

"I brought the tools in a box; nobody could have guessed what they were. I stored them away in the work-room—Dr. Endicott's laboratory, it is sometimes called. The doctor did not talk about what he was going to do; but he said a few words. He calmed me when I uttered some remonstrances and objections to his plan—for I assure you, sir, my heart failed me when I thought of all that had to be done—the digging up of the grave, and the taking that dear sweet lady out of her coffin, and so on. And I knew of Mr. Crawford's dislike to the idea, and I wondered whether he would get to know of our doings, and prosecute us—or kill us, even; that's what I thought of, again and again; for I gathered, from words that Dr. Endicott let drop, that Mr. Crawford was very violent sometimes in his moods."

Here he paused a little, and glanced furtively at Harold, as if to see whether the thought in his own brain had penetrated to that of the squire. But he could not tell. Harold was sitting pale and erect in the chair at the desk; not a muscle of his face had moved. No one

could complain of his want of self-command now; it was absolutely perfect. Martin Dale stared at him a little when he discovered this, and then went on smoothly, as if he had never suspected rocks ahead:

"But Dr. Endicott told me that I need not be afraid, that he undertook the whole responsibility, and that none of it would fall on my shoulders; he also offered a small present for my share in the trouble, a present which I must confess that I took, as the buying of tools, etc., had been managed by myself. On the night after the funeral, which Dr. Endicott himself attended, I waited in the laboratory until the doctor should join me. He came in so muffled and disguised that at first I did not know him. At midnight we went to the grave, carrying our tools."

"You infernal villains!" said Harold slowly. "Had you no fear or shame at the thought of violating my mother's grave?"

Martin Dale's wide mouth expanded with an unpleasant smile.

"Fear I had certainly," he replied. "Shame? No. Why should I be ashamed of Dr. Endicott's enthusiasm for science, or my implicit obedience to his commands? You are like your father, Mr. Crawford, and do not comprehend the nature of the situation."

"I honor and sympathize with my father's feelings. I have no doubt that they are incomprehensible to you, sir. Kindly go on with your story."

"It isn't a very long one. We dug up the grave and opened the coffin."

Then Martin Dale came to a sudden pause. There was an expression on Harold Crawford's face which rather frightened him.

"I hope, sir," he said hesitatingly, "that you don't mean to hold me responsible. I protest against bodily violence. If you use it, you will find that I am not unarmed."

"I do not mean to use bodily violence," said Harold contemptuously, "though I should not mind kicking you out of the house as a matter of personal taste. But I want to hear the rest of your story first. You need not be afraid."

"I am very near the end of my story now—as far as I know it," said Dale, rather sullenly. "Just as we neared the climax, so to speak, of the work we were interrupted."

"Interrupted? By whom?"

"That I can't tell you. That you may be able to find out for yourself. Mr. Harold Crawford. Someone had tracked us—someone threw himself upon us, attacking Dr. Endicott with what seemed to be prodigious strength—a tall broad figure in a cape or cloak."

Harold started to his feet. “Good God!” he cried. “It must have been—my father.”

“I have thought so since, Mr. Crawford,” said Martin quietly.

Harold stood for a moment, as if ready to rush away on some wild errand of justice or revenge; then his muscles seemed to relax, and he sank back in his chair, covering his face with his hands. He felt faint and sick; a crowd of terrible possibilities presented themselves to his mind and almost overwhelmed him. For a few moments he kept silence, then looked up with a ghastly face, and motioned to Martin to proceed.

“Well, sir, when I saw how things had turned out, I was in a dreadful fright. I didn’t know how we were to avoid exposure and disgrace and punishment. I thought to myself, ‘The sooner I’m out of this the better,’ so off I went, full pelt, to the gate; leaving the two men struggling together beside the open grave.”

“Yes, and what was the end?”

“I told you I didn’t know.”

“You did not stay to see?”

“Not I—I made my way out of the place as fast as I could.”

“One must not be surprised at any sort of skulking cowardice, after what you have told me,” said Harold, in biting tones; “and yet I am a little

astonished that you did not wait to see the result."

"Fact was, I thought the game was up," said Martin Dale. "I did not see how Endicott could get away without being discovered. The man, whoever it was that had found him, could not be silenced. There was sure to be an awful row about the whole affair, and I was determined to be out of it. I slipped back to the house, and took a few things that belonged to me"—and other things that did not belong to him if the truth had been told!—"and struck out, 'cross country, for the junction. I thought the doctor was ruined, and that it was no use my sticking to him—I'd better be off as soon as possible. I didn't know then how clever the doctor was."

"What did you do?" said Harold, looking at him much as one looks at a noxious reptile, which we would prefer to keep at arm's length. "Where did you go?"

"I went to Liverpool. Thought I would start for New York at once; but luck was against me. I fell ill, had to go to hospital, and did not know anything more for the next six weeks. Then I was afraid to inquire. I heard some cock-and-bull story about a doctor being sent to penal servitude for malpractices, and I fancied it must be Endicott. So I made my way to the

States, and should have stopped there if I hadn't had the devil's own luck. I was cleaned out at last; and then I thought I would come back to England and see whether there was anything to be made out of what I knew.”

“You did not seem to know much when you spoke to me first.”

“I did not know that your father had—disappeared, if you mean that,” said Dale meaningly.

“You said to me that you thought you had seen him since I had.”

“Of course. It was your father that was struggling with Dr. Endicott in the churchyard: I could swear to that. Besides, I heard his voice. But what I never could make out was—whether that little struggle ever got into the papers or not. From what I have heard since I came back I conclude that it did not.”

“No,” said Harold, “it did not.”

“This is, as I thought, the first you've heard of it?”

“It is.”

“Don't you think you ought to give me five-and-twenty pounds more for the information?” And then, as Harold turned away from him in speechless disgust, Mr. Dale added with some attempt at jocoseness: “Fifty's small enough for giving you news of your father, isn't it? Besides, if you take the matter up and investigate it, you

can't get much further without me, you know. Dr. Endicott says that he'll deny the whole story, if I tell it."

"You have been to him?"

"Oh, yes, I've been to him."

"And how much did he give you?"

Martin Dale brought his fist down on the table with an angry stroke. "He would not give more than a sovereign, 'for old acquaintance' sake,' as he put it, the lying hypocrite. I thought I should have made something out of him—what with the threat of exposing him in the newspapers—telling you the story—informing his daughter, and so on."

A strange quiver suddenly passed over Harold's face. "And he refused to listen?"

"Yes; he said that all the world knew as much of that story as I did—or something of that kind. An infernal lie! Nobody knows a word about it; and that is why I have come to you, sir, because I believe that there is still more—more than Stephen Endicott chooses to tell."

"You believe," said Harold slowly, "that he knows what became of my father?"

"I believe he does—only too well," said Martin Dale.

There was a pause: Harold was still very pale, and his face was set in an expression which Martin Dale could not translate.

“Think what it all points to,” said the latter, in a tone of oily persuasiveness. “Think what it means. Those two men were struggling together for life and death, at a certain hour on a certain night. Next day one of these men has disappeared—what became of him? The man with whom he was fighting preserves a discreet silence—in itself suspicious—as to their quarrel. What’s the inference? Foul play! It’s my belief, Mr. Harold Crawford, that your esteemed father was made away with by Dr. Stephen Endicott, and that it will fall to your lot to bring the crime home to him.”

The last words seemed to sting the young man into new life and vigor. But his reply was not such as Martin had looked for. It consisted in the terse ejaculation, “May God forbid!”

Then the young squire turned to his desk, and drew out his check-book.

“Come,” he said sharply, “I’ve listened to you, and am willing to pay you a price for your information; or rather for your secrecy. Do you understand? I’m willing to pay you so much a year, if you stay away from this place—if out of England, all the better!—and if you hold your tongue!”

“Hold my tongue!” exclaimed Martin Dale, in great bewilderment of spirit. “But I thought you would wish to bring the culprit to justice.”

"We don't know that he is the culprit. We do not know even whether my father is dead or not," said Harold resolutely. "We have nothing but a bare possibility to go upon. Nevertheless, I don't choose that rumors of this kind should get about the neighborhood. Dr. Endicott was an old friend of my parents; and although what you have said about his reopening my mother's grave surprises and shocks me very much, yet that is a very different thing from committing murder. Will a hundred a year satisfy you?"

"No, it won't," said Martin Dale sullenly. "A pretty son you are, Mr. Crawford, to be so chary of avenging your father out of friendship for your guardian."

"That is no affair of yours. Keep a civil tongue in your head, you cur, or I'll have you kicked out of the house!" said Harold passionately. Then he caught himself up, and spoke calmly once more. "What amount do you wish for? I need not give you anything at all; it is only that I wish to guard my friend's reputation from your lying tongue. Two hundred a year?"

After a little hesitation Martin Dale consented to receive this sum, in quarterly installments, on condition that he said no more about what he had seen in the churchyard, unless Harold Crawford called upon him to speak, and that

he reside at a place not within a hundred miles of Fenby. And then at last he took his leave, with the first installment of his annuity in his pocket, and a satisfied belief that he had done well for himself, under the circumstances, although they had not been exactly to his mind.

As for Harold, when he was once more alone, he broke down completely. The suspicion which had been thrown upon Dr. Endicott's character and good faith was bitterly painful to him—more painful, even, than Dr. Endicott's recent behavior to himself had been. For although Harold had never liked his guardian overmuch, he had believed in him. He had thought him a man of honor, a man of principle; he had admired his intellect and revered his moral strength. And to think for a moment that he was guilty of the crime attributed to him—guilty, moreover, of treachery, fraud, meanness, even of cowardice, the very vice which Harold hated and abhorred—was a great shock to the young man. And that it should be Alice's father, too! No, it was impossible that he should believe these things of Alice's father, and he would not entertain for a moment the idea that they could be true.

But the roots of suspicion strike deep. The more Harold thought of the circumstances, the more it seemed to him terribly possible that Martin Dale's story

should be true. Dr. Endicott's unreasonable anger, when Harry Crawford's disappearance had been spoken of by his son, would then be explained. The mysterious quarrel between the squire and the doctor, a day or two after Mrs. Crawford's death—a quarrel which had become known to the whole neighborhood—would then be explained. Even Dr. Endicott's reluctance to accept Harold as a son-in-law was capable of explanation on other grounds besides the ground of tendency to disease. Harold groaned aloud as this conviction forced itself upon him.

He did not know what to do. He had silenced Martin Dale, but was that enough? Ought he, indeed, to have silenced him at all? And was there any method of arriving at the truth?

He thought at first that he would not mention to any living soul what he had heard. But the temptation to confide in the vicar proved too strong for him, after what had previously passed between them. And probably to tell the whole story to the vicar was about the wisest thing that he could do. Mr. Wykeham pledged himself solemnly to secrecy, but half repented the pledge before half the tale was told.

"It is a very serious matter, Harold," he said at the close of the narrative.

"You need hardly tell me that sir," said Harold, rather gruffly.

"The question is—is there anything to be done?"

"Could you go to Dr. Endicott yourself, sir, and ask him."

"My dear Harold, do you think it would be of any use?"

"It might. He might tell us all that we want to know."

"I think it more likely that he would deny the whole story," said the vicar gravely, "and then we should be worse off than we were; because our suspicions would not exactly be allayed, and we should have no excuse for searching further into the matter."

"How can we search any further?" said Harold gloomily; and for an instant or two the men sat silent. Then the vicar spoke.

"Harold, do you know my nephew, Cyril Wykeham?"

Harold shook his head.

"A young doctor. He is staying here at present. If you will allow me, I will put a question to him without telling him any of these facts. I should very much like to know whether, at this distance of time, we could still find out by examination whether Mrs. Crawford's body had been touched since it was placed in the ground. If it had been removed or handled in any way, and we could ascertain the fact, it would go some way toward determining the truth of Martin Dale's story."

"Ask him," said Harold curtly. "But if it could be done—how would it affect us? We could not go ourselves—like Endicott."

"It would not be necessary," said the vicar quietly. "I should never do anything illegal. I would take steps to procure an order for the exhumation of the body."

Harold shuddered a little, but answered steadily:

'Very well, sir. Do as you think fit.'

CHAPTER XVII.

TWO QUESTIONS.

CYRIL WYKEHAM was a brisk young doctor of the modern scientific type, and he pricked up his ears at the notion that anything so exciting and interesting as the exhumation of a dead woman's body was likely to be going on in the placid little village of Fenby. Mr. Wykeham did not at first supply him with all the facts of the case, but merely asked him whether it would be possible to ascertain, after twelve years, whether or not any traces of previous exhumation and autopsy remained.

At first Cyril was doubtful. "It depends so much on the nature of the

coffin and of the soil," he said. "Everything might have crumbled away to dust, you know; it takes less than that time to do it when a body is exposed to the natural chemical influences. But if it were a lead coffin——"

"It was not that," said the vicar. "But it's a curious fact—there is something of an embalming quality in the soil of our churchyard; it has been discussed and written about, times without number. In several cases, when the alterations in the church were going on, and coffins were accidentally injured, it was found that even the features of persons who had died many years before remained intact."

"I've heard of that before," said Cyril, "but never quite credited it, saving your presence, vicar. However, here's a splendid chance to put the matter to the proof. Let us dig up the grave you are thinking about—whose is it, by the way?"

"Well, Cyril, I'll think it over first, before I tell you."

He had not counted on his nephew's shrewdness. "You need not take the trouble," said the young man coolly, "It is the late Mrs. Crawford's, of course."

"How do you know that?" said the vicar, startled.

"Hasn't Hal Crawford been closeted with you day after day in your study?"

coming out with as troubled an air as if he had the cares of the universe on his shoulders! Have you not both walked up to the churchyard and surveyed her grave half a dozen times in the course of the last few days? And are not certain of my medical books—all bearing on one subject—missing from my shelves? I know what Mrs. Crawford suffered from, of course; all the world knows, because Endicott never disguised the fact that he experimented upon her—I suppose he had a *post-mortem*?”

“That is just what we should like to find out,” said Mr. Wykeham.

“What on earth for?” said Cyril, staring.

“That I can’t tell you, unless Harold gives me leave. If we do this thing, Cyril, we may count on you to help us, may we not?”

“Certainly, I shall be delighted,” said Cyril, with alacrity. And the vicar went to interview Harold once more on the subject.

He found the young man evidently suffering—physically and mentally. He was very white, and the circles round his eyes were black, while his brow was contracted by pain.

“Headache,” he said lightly, in answer to the vicar’s anxious inquiries. “It will pass off; I’ve had a good deal of it lately.”

"You want change of air," said the vicar.

He was astonished by the suddenness and sharpness of Harold's reply.

"I want ease of mind," he said. "If I had that, I should do well enough."

He listened almost in silence to what the vicar had to say respecting Cyril's opinion; then he got up and went to the window, and stood there for some time without speaking.

"Well?" said the vicar at length.

"It seems to me," Harold said, in a subdued voice, "that we are not acting fairly."

"My dear boy—how? to whom?"

"To Dr. Endicott."

"If matters are as we fear they are," said the vicar, very gravely, "I am afraid that Dr. Endicott cannot be saved even by you, Harold."

"I know—I know. But it is for her sake, too; not only for his. Can't you understand, sir, that I most earnestly hope that Martin Dale's insinuations may have no foundation of truth?"

"I understand that, certainly," said Mr. Wykeham, with some emotion; "but on the other hand, Harold, I fear that you think they are true—or why should you have paid Martin Dale to go away?"

"That is against me, isn't it?" said Harold, smiling in a constrained manner, "but I can't pretend to be very

logical just now. The one thing I know is this—I will not go on acting behind Dr. Endicott's back: I shall go to him myself, tell him what I think and do not want to think, and what I am going to do."

The vicar paused for a little while before he answered:

"You may be right, Harold. At any rate you will be acting in a very straightforward and generous way. But you will have a hard task."

"I know that."

"And you will not be successful."

"You mean that he will tell me nothing?"

"Not a word."

But Harold, in his youthful hope and simplicity, did not quite believe this. He thought that Stephen Endicott might be induced to tell him the whole story, as far as he knew it, of Lilian Crawford's death and burial, and of her husband's subsequent disappearance.

He did not know whether the doctor were at home or not, on the evening when he set out for the Manor House. But he could not wait to find out. He felt that he must go at once and do what he believed to be his duty. There was a certain awkwardness in walking up to the house and asking for the doctor, of which, at any other time, he would have been painfully conscious; but on this occasion it seemed to him a trifle. He

had chosen a rather late hour, in order to show at once that his visit was not to be esteemed an ordinary call: and he sent in his card with these words written upon it: "May I see you on important business for a few minutes?" For answer the doctor himself appeared, and, after a cold and rather surprised word of greeting, conducted him to the study.

It was a warm summer night, and the sky was not yet dark; nevertheless the doctor at once lighted the lamps and pulled down the blinds, as if he did not wish to remember the sweet influences of flowers and stars. He indicated a chair to his visitor, but Harold would not sit down. Perhaps this fact struck Dr. Endicott, as at last he faced his guest and found him still standing.

"You say your business is important," he began. "If so, it is fortunate that you came to-night. I and my daughter are leaving England to-morrow."

"I think that, when you have heard what I have to say, sir, you may see the advisability of putting off your journey for some little time," said Harold gently.

"Why should I put it off? Because you do not wish to lose my daughter out of your sight, I suppose. I tell you that that is all folly; I will not hear a word of it. If you have come here to-night for the purpose of pleading

your cause, playing on my feelings, and so on, you are much mistaken, and had better take yourself off at once."

There was a change in his voice. It was no longer suave, smooth, composed; there was a harshness in it which had never been there before. Harold looked at him earnestly. He saw—and saw with deep pity and deep alarm—that the man's face had hardened and darkened during the past few weeks; that it was no longer the bland and smiling mask which the doctor had worn so successfully for many years before his patients and his friends; it was the face of a man of strong will, fierce passions, and evil life. It was not the face of Stephen Endicott at all; it was the face of a man whom Harold Crawford did not know. Involuntarily he felt something that was almost like fear, but he thrust it back, and remembered that the task before him had been undertaken for Alice's sake.

"I have not come to speak about your daughter, Dr. Endicott," said Harold gravely; "but about yourself!"

"That is a new departure." The doctor sneered. "And pray, what do you wish to say about myself?"

"I am in a very painful position," said the younger man. "I shall seem to you as if I were merely insulting you; yet insult is very far from my thoughts. I came here, sir, to give you a sort of

warning—and I trust you will pardon me, if it is unwelcome.”

“Are you mad, Harold Crawford? A warning—from you! This is ridiculous!”

“It may not seem so ridiculous to you,” Harold responded steadily, “if I mention the name of—Martin Dale: a man well-known to you, I think, in days gone by.”

He saw that he had produced an impression. The doctor seemed suddenly to pull himself together, and to reflect.

“Martin Dale!” he said, pulling the mask, as it were, over his face again. “I recollect—a lying, dishonest scoundrel, who robbed me and ran away—what of him, Harold?”

“He has been to see me,” said Harold, in some embarrassment.

“And he has told you a pack of lies about me, I’ll be bound. I understand,” said Dr. Endicott, surveying the young man’s face with an air of pitying amusement, behind which, however, even to Harold, there seemed to lurk a never-sleeping watchfulness. “And you have come to put me on my guard? That is very kind of you, my dear boy, and just what I should have expected from your character. But as to this Martin Dale, he and his stories are hardly worth the trouble!”

“You have to some extent guessed

the nature of my visit," said Harold, recovering himself and speaking with emphasis; "but you do not in any way realize the gravity of the accusation which he brings against you!"

"Do I not? Well, perhaps not," said the doctor easily. "It goes for very little, whatever it may be. If you had kicked him out of the house, Harold, or given him a good thrashing, we should hear no more about it."

"We shall hear no more about it—from him. I have taken care of that," said Harold, with some grimness; "but there is more to be said. He told me a long story; and—in short—I am not satisfied."

The pleasantness went out of Dr. Endicott's face. "What the devil are you not satisfied about?" he said.

"I cannot decide in my own mind whether he spoke the truth or not," said Harold frankly.

"And what does it matter whether he spoke the truth or not?"

"It matters to me, because it concerns my father's fate, and the way in which he and my mother were treated by yourself. And it matters also," said the young man, his voice softening, "because it concerns your honor, Dr. Endicott, and you are the father of the woman that I love."

"I am much obliged to you," said the doctor sarcastically. But he had

changed color, and turned away as if he did not wish to meet Harold's eye. "You are complimentary. Pray, what do you come to me for?"

"Because I want you to be so good as to answer me two questions."

"Consider the conversation ended, then. I am not to be questioned by a boy."

"I fear, sir," said Harold, with much hesitation and concern, "that if you do not answer me you will be asked the same questions by others; and perhaps less considerately."

This remark seemed to strike Dr. Endicott. He moved uneasily, and did not speak at once.

"You had better ask your questions and get them over, then," he said, trying to keep up the contemptuous tone. "But I do not promise to answer. If they are insolent and useless questions, I shall refuse to answer. You ask then at your peril."

"There is nothing insolent in the questions. Whether they are useless or not, I think it is for me to judge. Will you tell me whether you made an examination of my mother's body after her death?"

"I did not. Your father refused to allow it."

"Martin Dale's statement is to the effect that you went with him to the churchyard, dug up the grave, and ex-

humed the body. At least, he believes so."

Here Harold made a mistake. He should have spoken with confidence; and not said that Martin "believed so." And emboldened by this mistake, which he was quick to see, Stephen Endicott went on to make another. For if he had boldly acknowledged that he had attempted and then relinquished that attempt upon the grave, it was possible that Harold would have given up his first idea of reopening it.

"No," said Dr. Endicott. "The man lied. I never went near the grave. If anyone went there, it must have been himself."

"That is, of course, possible," said Harold. "I come to my second question—what do you know of my father's disappearance that the world does not know?"

"Your first question is natural enough," said the doctor. "Your second is as insolent as it is futile. But I will answer it, and by that you will spare me future insults. I know nothing — absolutely nothing — of your father's disappearance but what the whole world knows."

Harold was at first staggered by the doctor's manner; and then relieved. Surely he could not be playing a part; he must be speaking the truth when his manner was so bold, so weighty, and

yet so undisturbed. His brow cleared as he replied:

"I am glad indeed to hear you say so. You know there can be no question between us as to your good faith: I trust your word most absolutely. At the same time it seems to me that these slanders against your good name ought to be cleared up, sir. I should like, with your permission, to tell you the whole of Martin Dale's story. He assures me that he saw, with his own eyes, my father in the churchyard that night—saw him struggling and fighting desperately with someone—yourself, he says—beside an open grave."

"Folly!" ejaculated Stephen Endicott. "How you, a sensible man, can let yourself be carried away by a story of this kind—upon my word, Harold, I cannot imagine. I will not listen to a word more of it."

Harold looked at him in surprise. It seemed to him that the doctor's sudden anger was unreasonable. He remonstrated.

"It would really be better, sir, if you would kindly listen to the whole story, and give me the means of contradicting it, should it ever be repeated. There is no absolute means of securing Dale's silence; and one ought to be on one's guard when slanders of this sort are current."

"Slanders of what sort? I am at a

loss to know what you mean," said the doctor angrily.

"I did not want to put it into words," said Harold, "but since you compel me, Dr. Endicott, I shall do so. Martin Dale suggests, if he does not actually asseverate, that you, on the night after my mother's funeral—you—killed my father. I want the means of contradicting this story, and of establishing your innocence—of which nobody is more absolutely certain than I am myself."

But his last words passed unheeded. Stephen Endicott had turned round, an image of livid fury, and struck him in the face. The two men glared at each other savagely for a moment; then Harold, who had raised his hand, let it sink to his side.

"I will not forget that you are Alice's father," he said simply.

Dr. Endicott, his anger past, leaned back against the heavy writing table; his breath came in thick pants, and the perspiration stood in heavy beads upon his brow. Despite his own righteous anger, Harold could not but look at him compassionately.

"I know that it must have been a shock to you, sir," he said, "and I can forgive a blow given in haste on such provocation. You will remember, I hope, that I have done all that I can do to spare you vexation and annoyance. As my appeal to you has produced no

result, I shall go on to the next step that has been advised. I shall proceed to an examination of my mother's grave; I will find out whether it has been tampered with or not. It is not too late."

He scarcely knew whether he was heard or not. Dr. Endicott had sunk down into the nearest chair, and was hiding his face in his hands. Harold stepped to the door, opened it, and went out into the hall, making his way rather blindly to the front door, for he was still a little dazed by the blow and by the violence of his own emotions.

But ere he reached the door a hand was laid upon his arm, a gentle voice sounded in his ear: "Harold, what is it? I heard your voices; and father seemed so angry. O Harold, dear!"

He turned, and with one swift movement gathered her into his strong arms, and pressed his lips to hers. "My love! my love! my darling!"

She stirred in his arms like a frightened bird.

"Harold, is there anything wrong? anything new, I mean?"

"Darling," said Harold, looking into her loving eyes with love which was no weaker than her own, "darling, will you always trust me?"

"Always, Harold."

"Even if you hear things against me — even if things go very, very wrong?"

"Always, my dearest."

"And you will love me?"

"Forever," she answered, and then they said good-by.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SECOND TIME.

"MY own theory is this," said Cyril Wykeham, when his uncle had put him into full possession of the facts which had come to Harold's knowledge: "Endicott did get hold of the body, which accounts for his information on the subject of Mrs. Crawford's disease; but that he was discovered in the very act by Crawford himself, and that the struggle which followed led to Crawford's death."

"Do you mean that you think Stephen Endicott murdered his friend?" said the vicar incredulously.

"Not designedly so. He struck too hard; probably rendered him insensible, and took him perhaps to his own house, where he died. Endicott's laboratory was more useful than we know. He most likely reduced the body to ashes, and——"

"My dear Cyril, your imagination is running away with you. Remember the issues involved," said Mr. Wyke-

ham, in a tone of reproof; for he could not help fancying that he distinguished a tone of enjoyment in his nephew's summary of the situation.

"Oh, well," said Cyril, more seriously, "I hope it may not be so, of course; but in the meantime I should strongly advise an examination of the coffin and the grave: there may certainly be indications that it was disturbed after the burial, and in that case I should advise Harold to take out a warrant for Dr. Endicott's arrest."

"Harold will never do that," said the vicar, in a low tone.

"Somebody will have to do it, if our conjectures be true. Why not Harold?"

"Because, my dear Cyril, Harold is unfortunately attached to Dr. Endicott's daughter."

"That is awkward," said the flippant Cyril. "Nevertheless, a man can't let his father's murderer go unchanged, can he? A little difficult to marry the daughter afterward, I allow."

"Poor Alice!" sighed the vicar. "There is no happiness for her, I fear. I trust, sir," assuming a rather monitory tone, "you will let this incident be a warning to you against the evil effects of an overweening ambition. If Stephen Endicott had not been led astray by his desire to achieve distinction for himself——"

"Oh, come, Uncle John, that's going

it too strong," said Cyril good-humoredly. "Endicott's made a lot of discoveries: he's one of our best men, and you needn't tell me it's all because he wanted distinction for himself. The man must have wanted to relieve pain and cure disease, or he wouldn't have done all he has done."

"Perhaps you're right, Cyril," said the vicar, in a low, moved tone. "I ought not to have spoken in that way, I acknowledge. Yes, yes! poor Endicott has no doubt tried to do good as well as evil, and I hope that we may yet find that we are misjudging him."

"Give the devil his due," said the young doctor. "I believe Endicott murdered Crawford, but he's a capital man in the dissecting room, for all that."

At which the vicar frowned, and directly changed the topic of conversation.

He was struck by the fact that Dr. Endicott did not go away, after all. He sent his daughter to the seaside with her companion, and remained alone in the Manor House. This change of plan was significant. He had so far taken Harold's warning, that he would not leave England at present. And it was probable that he was wishful to remain at Fenby in order to see what Harold would do next.

But at this point the matter was to some extent taken out of Harold's

hands. The authorities had got wind of it, and interfered. Poor Harold had hoped that any inquiry or examination of the grave might take place in absolute privacy; but his hopes were destined to disappointment. An order had to be procured from the magistrates for the opening of Mrs. Crawford's grave; and representatives of the law had to be present, as well as the parties immediately interested. The public was, however, excluded, and even the reporters were kept out; so that as much secrecy was observed as could be expected in these days of newspaper accounts of every incident.

The day on which the examination of the grave was to be conducted was cloudy, but warm. There was a little touch of autumnal stillness in the air. It was tolerably early in the morning when the little group gathered in the churchyard; a motley group, consisting of Harold Crawford, the vicar, and his nephew; a couple of magistrates, and the family lawyer; a well-known doctor, and two strong men who were to act as grave-diggers under the supervision of the old sexton, Mr. Jacobs. Very little was said before the work began. Perhaps it was felt that nothing could be said in the presence of the pale-faced, silent young fellow to whom these proceedings must seem something like desecration. He stood beside the

grave—a noticeable figure, with head bent, and a stern determination upon his face, and careless talk died at the sight of him.

The vicar had tried to persuade him to absent himself. But Harold had flung back the proposition with passionate resentment. "Not be present?" he cried. "Who should be present then? I must be there to see that my mother's grave is treated with reverence."

"My dear Harold, would you not trust me for that?"

"Oh, yes, I would trust you, sir; forgive me if I speak roughly—I hardly know what I say. But I must be there, I am sure of that—and you must not try to keep me away."

And the vicar tried no more.

There was a curious silence in the air. It was a day on which the birds seem to forget to chirp, and the trees are motionless and still. The sounds of pick-ax and shovel seemed perternaturally loud. Mr. Wykeham could see how they jarred on Harold's every nerve; the young man grew paler and paler as time went on. Had he been a woman he would have fainted or wept; being a man, and a young one, he stood up at the head of the grave with a stony rigidity of expression, which was only a mask for keen emotion. Not a man there but understood that frozen fixity

of look, and respected him for his self-control.

It seemed like an eternity before the sound was heard which showed that the lowest depth was reached, and that the pick had struck against the coffin-lid. For a moment, there was a pause. The onlookers pressed closer to the open grave. The sexton gave some low directions to his assistants. In a very few minutes the coffin-lid was laid bare. Then arose a low cry from more than one observer's lips. "It is unscrewed. It was never properly fastened down!"

"It was fastened down properly enough when I saw it lowered there," said the sexton grimly. "Here, doctor, there's room for you beside it. It's partly fastened, you see—prize it open—there it goes. Ah!"

His exclamation was echoed by a shuddering sigh from others at the brink of the grave. The soil had, as the vicar had foreseen, some strange embalming quality, and when the lid of the coffin was removed the face and figure of its occupant were revealed in all their natural hues and outlines, as if the burial of the dead had taken place only an hour before. The texture of the clothes could still be seen, the hair was unchanged, the color of the face as it had been in days of life. But—this was what caused that exclamation of horror and dismay—the body was not that of

Lilian Crawford in her grave-clothes, but that of her husband, the man who had mysteriously disappeared from human ken so many years ago.

It was Harold who first uttered an intelligible word. "Father! Father!" he cried, in agonized tones, and then staggered and fell to the ground in a swoon. The shock following upon the long strain had been too much for him, and he had to be carried away to his own house, where he lay insensible for many hours. "The best thing that could happen to him," said the doctor. It was only to be hoped that he would not waken in delirium.

Even as the other bystanders stood and looked, a strange thing happened. Through the figure that lay before them so straight and still, a quiver seemed to pass; and then it crumbled before their sight—crumbled away to ashes, and was seen no more.

"It is God's doing," said the sexton. "He's kept him for this many a day that the wicked doings of someone might be exposed; for I suppose it's pretty clear that the poor gentleman met with foul play."

He was hushed, and told not to anticipate the finding of a jury; for an inquest would have to be held over poor Harry Crawford's remains. The cause of death had been clear enough to the doctor's practised eyes. The man's

skull had been well-nigh shattered by a blow.

The vicar had himself descended into the grave and looked on the face of his friend. And it was then—although no one noticed the movement—that he put out his hand and touched something that shone and glittered in the folds of the cloak thrown over the dead man's body. No one saw what he touched or what he took away.

And next moment it was all over. Dust and ashes remained, crumbling fragments that meant nothing, and told no story. The air of day had put an end to that wonderful state of preservation in which the body had been kept; and no trace of it was left behind.

But where was the body of Lilian Crawford?

At first it was imagined that this might yet be found. The sexton fancied that it lay, perhaps, underneath her husband's remains; but an investigation revealed the fact that it was not there at all. To the mind of the vicar and his nephew only one explanation of this fact was possible. Martin Dale's story had been true, and Dr. Endicott had taken away the body of Mrs. Crawford in order to use it for his own investigations. And that he had also committed the murder there could be no reasonable doubt.

The vicar's mind was torn in twain.

He loved Alice Endicott as a daughter; he loved Harold Crawford as a son. That Alice should know herself to be the daughter of a murderer, and that Harold should bring that murderer to justice, was enough to break their hearts and kill the happiness of both. And for what end? "It is not fair," said the vicar to himself; "it is not fair. The murderer will be punished, no doubt, by God himself. He is punished already, by the look I have seen sometimes upon his haggard face. Is there nothing to be done?"

His hand had closed involuntarily over something which he had taken from the coffin that morning, and he bent his head in anxious and toilsome thought.

Various formalities had had to be gone through, which had taken up a great part of the day; a visit had also been made to Harold's bedside, but the young man was still insensible, and could afford no comfort or advice to the vicar. Yet he knew that if he would do anything there was no time to be lost. Strange rumors were flying about the place; Dr. Endicott's name was already bandied from lip to lip, but rather in wonderment at his non-appearance than in actual accusation. But there was no time to lose. The vicar had never in his life set law and justice at defiance; but he meant to do so now.

Twilight was falling, and Stephen

Endicott sat alone in his study. He knew what had taken place that morning; he could not fail but be aware of it, for the whole village, and even his own household, buzzed and hummed with the news. At last he had shut himself up in his private room, and ordered that no one should come near.

He was suffering the agonies of a great dread. He knew what would be found when the grave was opened that afternoon. But what he did not know was whether any proof of his own guilt existed still. It was possible that he had left some trace of his presence behind; and that presently he should hear the tramp of the police constable at the door, and hear the words that arrested him on a charge of murder. He hardly considered how impossible it was that any such charge should be made at once. He did not stop to consider probabilities. He sat and waited, in a kind of dumb horror, with his hand on the revolver which he kept hidden in his desk; for he was resolved that he would never be taken away alive. Better a suicide's grave, he thought, than a felon's cell.

Someone came to the door at last—and knocked.

“Who is there?” said Dr. Endicott.

“Let me in, Endicott.” It was the vicar's voice. “I want to speak to you.”

“Are you alone?”

"Yes, quite alone."

The doctor opened the door, and the clergyman entered the room. No words of greeting were uttered, and neither of the men held out a hand. But they looked once into each other's face, and then half the tale was told. The doctor said something in a low tone: it sounded like an imprecation, and walked to his desk. The vicar followed him, and spoke in a subdued and careful voice.

"You know, I am sure, what I have come to tell you. Endicott, I do not know how matters may turn out, but I fear that you stand in a position of considerable danger."

"How can that be?" said Stephen dryly.

"You do not surely need me to tell you. Harold, poor boy, is prostrated—insensible. I do not know what line he means to take when he comes to himself. I suppose he will have to send for Martin Dale—and then——"

"Well?" said Dr. Endicott. "Do you think that his tale has any evidence?"

"I do not know whether there is more evidence than this," said the vicar. "But this is enough to—condemn you, Stephen Endicott." And he showed him something lying on his outstretched palm.

The doctor looked at it with a paling, horror-stricken face. It was a locket

and a fragment of gold chain—torn from his person in that last wild struggle with Harry Crawford, and ever afterward hidden in his grave. The initials stamped upon the locket were “S. E.”; and it held a small portrait of Dr. Endicott’s wife. There could be no doubt as to its original ownership.

“You found it?” said Endicott at length.

“I found it. No one else saw it. I have brought it to you.”

“For what reason?”

“Take it and keep it—destroy it, if you can,” said the vicar, almost fiercely. “Without it, there may be no direct evidence. Harold will silence Martin Dale, if he can——”

“Do you know that you are yourselves committing a crime?” said the doctor, in his coldest, sternest voice.

“I know. God forgive me! But it is for your daughter’s sake—and Harold’s. Surely you need not add this stain—this burden—to their innocent lives. I am certain that it was an accident—certain, or I would not act in this way. You would never have murdered your old friend; it was an accident.”

The doctor’s face changed. For one moment he put his hands over his eyes; and when he took them away the vicar thought that they were wet.

“God bless you, Wykeham!” he said

brokenly. "I thought nobody would believe me. Now that I find you do, I shall have strength to bear the rest. I will leave the matter in Harold's hands. He shall judge whether I am guilty or not; and then I will—go away."

"Go away?"

"Yes, so as not to trouble any of you with my presence. You shall hear from me to-morrow, Wykeham. I will tell you then what I am going to do. And thank you a thousand times for coming to me. It was an accident—and I have repented in dust and ashes ever since. But you shall know all to-morrow. What! you will shake hands with me again? You are too good, Wykeham. If God forgives—but this is foolishness. Good-night—good-by."

The vicar departed with eyes that were strangely dim; and the doctor sat down at his desk to write.

CHAPTER XIX.

A LETTER FROM THE DEAD.

MR. WYKEHAM was seated at the breakfast table next morning when his old servant, Rogers, who had been with him for the last thirty years, came in and stood beside his chair with such

a look of discomposure as immediately to enlist his master's attention.

"What is it, Rogers?"

"There's a woman here from the Manor House, sir. I'm afraid there's something wrong with Dr. Endicott. I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind seeing her, for we can't get a reasonable word out of her!"

The vicar rose hurriedly.

"What does this mean?" he ejaculated, half under his breath. And Cyril's muttered exclamation of "Suicide! I expected it," did not tend to raise his hopes.

The woman from the Manor House was the cook and housekeeper, and the vicar found her weeping and rocking herself to and fro, in a somewhat hysterical paroxysm of grief.

"Oh, poor master! poor master!" was all that at first she seemed able to say.

"What is it, my good woman? What has happened to your master?" the vicar asked.

"Oh, sir, he's gone! He's lying dead in the study. If you'd only come up to the house, sir, you'd see for yourself."

The vicar waited for no further particulars. He started at once for the Manor House, bidding Cyril come with him. And in an incredibly short space of time they stood in the room where, only the night before, he had held

Stephen Endicott by the hand and heard him say that he would "go away."

"Go away!" Yes, he had gone—gone to a country from which there was no return. He could answer no questions now. He could make no confession, submit to no punishment. He had gone to receive judgment from a higher tribunal than any in this ill-judging world.

He was sitting in a high-backed arm-chair, before his desk, looking very much as though he were asleep. His eyes were closed, his head leaning against the woodwork of the chair. His face was perfectly placid and emotionless. Indeed, as Mr. Wykeham looked at it, he seemed to see in the immobile features something of the nobleness, the calm, the lofty look, which Stephen Endicott's face had been framed to wear, if his outer life had corresponded with that ideal which always exists in the inner heart of men.

A phial, marked "Morphia—Poison," lay before him. A spoon and measuring glass stood by. The manner of his death was plain. But was all the world to know? A letter lay beside the phial, addressed to the Rev. John Wykeham. The vicar looked at it wistfully. Had any eyes seen that letter but his own? It would be his duty, he knew, to produce it at the coroner's inquest, and—for the second time in twenty-four

hours—he did not do his duty. That is to say, he put the duty of charity higher than his allegiance to the law of the land. He slipped the letter into his pocket, and did not open it until he was quite alone. And this was not for some time; for his next duty was to go away to the seaside town where Alice was staying, and break to her the news of her bereavement. It was a three hours' journey, and the vicar read the letter in the train. He could not do it before, and he was resolved to read it before he met Alice Endicott. He thought that he should then know better what to say to her.

He had a first-class carriage to himself, and could peruse his letter without fear of disturbance.

It was dated, he noticed, as carefully as usual, and written throughout in the doctor's clear, precise, beautiful hand. And this was what it said:

“MY DEAR WYKEHAM:

“I trust that you will feel no offense if I still address you in the old familiar way. It is for the last time. You will not be troubled by me again.

“It is almost a pleasure to me to reflect on this. And not only with respect to yourself. I feel with relief that I shall trouble no one any longer. To very many in this world my presence in it has brought sorrow, pain, misfor-

tune of various kinds. They will be freed from these things now, and I trust that their curses will not follow me to the grave.

“You may imagine that I have been brought very low before I could write in this way. Have you any idea of the hopes and aspirations with which I began my life? I was wild to do what I could for the human race; eager to alleviate pain and remove suffering; looking forward to a time when I should be a great healer and helper—longing to enroll my name among the great benefactors of the world. Jenner and Simpson and Lister were nothing to what I would be! You see the flaw easily enough? as I see it now. I thought myself animated only by the love of man, by the desire to lessen his suffering. I see now that, although I desired this, my motive-power was the love of fame, the love of power, the enthronement of self. Well, what matter? It is not so very bad a motive, is it? Many a man has gone through the world, guided by no higher aim, and has achieved for himself all that he desired. As for me, every effort that I have made seems to have failed; and I have brought the greatest suffering upon those that I have most deeply loved. Even Alice has suffered for my sake. Let it be my care now to see that she suffers no more through me, if any act

of mine will give her back the peace and happiness of which I have robbed her—poor little girl, poor little heart of mine!

“Wykeham, I had no evil intent in my heart when I first came here to live. I wanted to save Mrs. Crawford’s life, to keep her from suffering, and give her back to her husband’s arms. You know what her husband was; an impulsive, wrong-headed, impracticable man; but he loved her, and she loved him. I wanted to see them happy again together, and I did my best for her.

“It is natural and easy to put the good, well-sounding motive first. Of course, that was not my only motive for coming down to Fenby. With some cases, I should not have taken half the trouble. But it happened to be a case that interested me; I thought it was likely to throw light on an obscure point about which I had not hitherto been able to make up my mind. It seemed to me that I was within reach of discovering a remedy for all cases of cancer, cancerous growths, and tumors—a remedy greatly needed, and which no one had hitherto been able to find. I did not, as you know, quite succeed in doing this; but I succeeded so nearly that I have had the satisfaction of curing case after case which other doctors had pronounced incurable. Is not that something to be glad and even proud

of? And I did this chiefly through the light that I gained through Mrs. Crawford's case.

"I cured her, as you know. If she had lived six months longer, I should have been sure of that, without need of further examination. I was building great hopes on the result of those six months. I hoped to be able to say: 'Look at this case; here is a woman perfectly well and sound; and yet she was given up by the ordinary physicians of the day. This was my treatment—adopt it and you will save others as I have saved her.' Think of what that would have meant to me just then!

"But—she died. She was thrown out of a carriage, received fatal injuries, and died. My whole work was lost. If I cited her case, the answer would always be: 'Ah, yes! but she did not live long enough to prove anything. If she had lived a year or two without any trace or sign of disease, we would have acknowledged that she was cured; but, as she died, we cannot tell.' But there was one way in which we could tell—by an autopsy after death. My medical brethren would all ask me why this had not been made? and do you think that they would have believed me when I said that I could not make it because of her husband's refusal to permit such a thing? Not they!

"You see my difficulty. Crawford

would not see it—would not acknowledge that it mattered in the least. We had a quarrel on the subject; and he virtually turned me out of the house. I had no feeling of loyalty to our old friendship left me after that: he had thrown it away, and I was bound to him no longer. It seemed perfectly right and natural to me that I should take my own way. But, perhaps, I should not have managed the matter, but for the help of Martin Dale, who hissed his suggestion in my ear like the serpent that he was, and egged me on to the commission of a crime which he himself was too cowardly to carry through.

“It was on the night after the funeral that he and I went to the churchyard. I need not give you the painful details of that scene. Suffice it to say that our object was attained, and that we were preparing to remove that still fair and beautiful body from its resting place, when Harry Crawford bore down upon us, mad and blind with rage. He struck me, and I struck back. Martin Dale fled, at the first sound of blows. For two or three minutes Harry and I wrestled together, forgetful of everything but our wild, instinctive anger; and finally he fell. Fell and lay still—I shall never forget how still. I called to him, I tried to revive him; I do not know how long a time I spent in agonizing, fruitless efforts to bring him back

to life; but it was all in vain. I had killed the friend of my youth by my hasty blow. I was another Cain—a murderer, an outcast and a wanderer from henceforth on the face of the earth.

“No, that I vowed to myself I would not be. I would hide every trace of the murder, if murder it was, and lead the life that I had always led. It was an accident, I told myself; and I would not be treated as a felon because of this hasty blow. But what should I do with Harry Crawford’s dead body? The answer was plain. I would place it in his wife’s grave and bury her elsewhere—afterward.

“I carried out my plan. I placed him in the grave, heedless, however, of the broken chain and locket, which must have fallen upon him as I arranged the coverings above his lifeless body, and which would have been held as a sure witness to my crime, had they been discovered where they lay. I did all that I had planned to do. I carried Mrs. Crawford’s body to my laboratory, I filled in the grave, smoothed it, replaced the wreaths of flowers which served to hide my imperfect handiwork, then went home again, shut myself into the laboratory, and did my work.

“The strain was awful. Several times I thought I should break down while I was in the midst of it. But the

strength of my will, I suppose, or the strength of my ambition, bore me through. I examined the tissues, separated nerve from nerve, made my notes of the case, and used the microscope with as much calmness as if I had been in the dissecting room of a London hospital. And my examination proved that my theories had been correct. The disease was cured—gone; not a trace of it remained. I had gained the first real triumph of my life—but at what a cost!

“Martin Dale’s disappearance gave me a great deal of anxiety. True, he had absconded with some of my money, which caused me to hope that it would be long before he dared show his face here again; but I was not free from the fear that he would try to blackmail me, or would otherwise molest me in after years. In this fear, as it now turns out, I was perfectly justified. But for him, Harold Crawford would never have set on foot the proceedings which have resulted in the discovery of his father’s body and of my crime. My death, therefore, lies at Martin Dale’s door. I will never live to see disgrace. And disgrace cannot be obviated if I live. Possibly, when I am dead, the facts may be kept at least from Alice’s ears; and those who know them will extend pity to me rather than execration.

“You will ask me what I did with Mrs. Crawford’s body. I gave it rever-

ent and careful burial in my own garden. You remember the cairn of stones outside my study window? It is there that Lilian Crawford lies. You will take her up and lay her at her husband's side, I suppose? If I might express a wish, I should wish to be laid near them; but their son may object to this. After all, they were my only friends. And I did not mean to injure them, though it has been my fate to do so, and I continued the injury to their son. I have done the best for Harold in many ways that I could possibly do, and I ask his forgiveness for the rest. Perhaps in some other world I shall be able to ask his mother's forgiveness too.

"There is one point which I must not forget. It has reference to Harold's proposal for my daughter's hand. I refused it—what else could I do?—but the reason given for my refusal was not a true one. You must tell Harold this. It was the only colorable pretext I could think of for declining his offer. As a matter of fact, I believe him to possess a perfectly pure and sound constitution, and the disease from which his mother suffered was not one which was likely to leave the slightest taint in him. There is no reason why he should not marry, and let the name of Crawford go down for generations yet to come. I never met before with a young man who took the medical opinion I gave him so seri-

ously. I expected him to laugh it to scorn, and to regard it as an old doctor's fad. But to my immense surprise, he looked upon it almost as gravely as I should have done myself, had it been true. I was sorry for the pain I gave him—but I saw no other way of placing a barrier between Alice and himself.

“That barrier is gone. I think it right to take it down before I go hence. But I have perhaps erected one still greater, and more insuperable. It may be so. I see how terrible is the position of a man who loves the daughter of his father's murderer: it is one which has been treated by novelist, poet, dramatist, and always treated in the same way—with the inevitable moral that the children suffer for their father's sins.

“Must they? I do not know. You will be able to advise them better than I. But I will beg Harold Crawford to remember that, if motives go for anything, my motives were not altogether bad. I wanted to advance the cause of science, as well as my own good. If I struck Harry Crawford, it was because he struck me first, and self-defense is not a crime. No stain of willful murder rests upon my soul to blight my daughter's life.

“Certainly, no willful murderer could, I think, have suffered more than I. From that moment forward my enjoyment of life was gone. The zest of

my researches, the delight of my success—these were over. All that I had left was a pricking consciousness of wrong, a haunting fear, a weight of concealment. Many a time I wished that I had boldly avowed the deed, and taken the consequences. Ruin, shame, public disgrace, imprisonment, would have been as nothing to the pangs I have borne, and shall always have to bear, until Death puts an end to all.

“But Death, you will tell me, is not the end. Well, be it so. Wherever I am going, I can know nothing worse than the last few months of my life have been. A sin which is known and repented of and punished—severe as the punishment may be—is robbed of half its weight. I would to God that I had not shirked the penalty in this life—but part of it at least has been mine.

“Good-by, old friend. I thank you for your kindness to me and mine. You will be a better father to Alice than I have been. You will give my love to her, and shield her as much as possible from the knowledge of my unworthiness.

“STEPHEN ENDICOTT.”

The vicar's eyes filled with tears as he laid the letter down.

“Poor Endicott!” he said to himself. “He has paid a heavy price. And how am I to tell Alice that he has gone?”

But he had very little need to put his story into words. When once she had looked into his pitying face, she knew what he had come to say.

CHAPTER XX.

IN SPITE OF ALL.

MORE than twelve months had passed since the day of Stephen Endicott's death: more than twelve months since the interment of Harry Crawford and his wife in one grave, with their old friend almost at their feet. The vicar had carried out Dr. Endicott's wishes as to his place of burial, although he had not been able to consult Harold on the subject. Harold was then too ill to be consulted about anything. He came back to life through a long and tedious convalescence, and it was not until he was growing strong again that Mr. Wykeham put the doctor's letter into his hands, and left him alone to read it.

When he came back Harold was still lying on the couch where he had been resting when the vicar gave him the letter, but his face was turned away. Mr. Wykeham sat down beside him and waited.

"Why did you not show me this

before?" the young man asked at length.

"I hardly thought you were strong enough to read it, my dear boy."

"Strong enough!" And he turned round to face the vicar with a new brightness in his eyes. "Don't you see that this will give me fresh strength to go on again? I shall get better now."

The vicar did not altogether understand; but he thought it advisable to await explanation until it should be offered him. And his patience was rewarded, for Harold finally spoke again.

"I suppose that people might say that it was unnatural in one to feel as much pity as I do for Dr. Endicott."

"No, I think not, my dear lad," said the vicar mildly. "I think that if ever a man deserved pity, it was Stephen Endicott."

"Yes," said Harold hesitatingly. "Only—I've felt it all along. I felt somehow that his life could not be all a lie. I believed, in spite of appearances, that there must be a great deal of good in the man who worked as hard as he did for the suffering and the needy. I've never guessed until lately how much good he did in town—attending cases without pay, and giving his great skill to the poorest patients. And when, at first, I knew what he had done here—and thought that it had all been in malice and wickedness—I lost belief

in him, and everything seemed confused—and there was no good and no evil, and no balance in things. Do you understand?"

"I think I do."

"Well, now that I have read his letter, the balance seems straight again. I see that his life was not happy and successful, as it looked. I suppose—in fact"—and the words stumbled a little on his lips, for Harold was not accustomed to talking of his deeper convictions—"I suppose that God—does look after that, and pays back in his own way."

"‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay,’" the vicar murmured. "There is no need of our vengeance, then, Harold."

"No, nor even of our enmity," said the young man quietly. "That is what I mean."

"You can forgive him?"

"I think my mother and father must have done so. Don't you? Well, then, I've no right to do anything else. And the man's dead."

There was a little silence, after which Harold roused himself to speak more practically.

"I have cleared my mind now," he said, "and so I can ask about some other things. Did the whole story come out at the inquest or not?"

"There was no evidence to connect Dr. Endicott with your father's death.

The finding of your dear mother's grave had not become public property when the inquest on your father's body was held, and therefore no accusation was ever brought—formally, that is to say. Probably, if Dr. Endicott had lived, and the matter had been pressed, it would all have been found out. But the jury here is not remarkable for keenness of wit, and the whole thing fell to the ground."

"People talked, I suppose?"

"A great deal. No doubt most people believe that Dr. Endicott was responsible. His death made him look guiltier than he was. For although the jury brought it in 'Accidental death through an overdose of morphia,' everybody believed it to be suicide. The matter rests, however, 'Not proven' in law."

"This letter, then—it was not produced in court?"

"No," said the vicar. "I was not asked about it, and did not choose to volunteer the information. I may have been wrong; but I thought it better to save Dr. Endicott's reputation as far as I could, if only for his daughter's sake."

It was his first reference to Alice. Harold's face twitched a little, but he only said:

"She does not know, then?"

"She knows nothing," said the vicar.

“Don’t tell her,” said Harold, with a start. “She had better never know. She loved her father dearly.”

And then he turned his face to the wall again, and said no more. When next he opened his lips it was to ask questions about German towns, and to send for an atlas in order that he might map out a foreign tour.

But that was more than twelve months ago. It was not summer weather now. Christmas was over, the New Year had begun; the January frosts were merging into the warmer airs of February. Already the snowdrop had put up its fair white head, and the purple crocus shadowed the golden glories of its yellow mate. In the churchyard, which was sheltered from the north and east, the green grass was spangled with these early blossoms, and the trees that waved their branches above Lilian Crawford’s grave were showing signs of budding life. Spring was coming early, and the wind blew softly from the west, with hints of primrose and violet perfume in its breath.

It was on a Saturday afternoon when Alice Endicott came slowly up the lane, entered the churchyard, and walked toward her father’s grave. She had a basket on her arm, filled with spring flowers, which she had woven together with tenderest skill. She laid it on the ground, and knelt for a brief space

beside the grave, with hands clasped as if in prayer. Was she praying for the dead? She hardly knew. But mixed with her aspirations and hopes for those who were gone before, there was a stronger vein of hope and prayer for one who was still on earth, and was still, as he would ever be, dearer than all the world to her.

And someone, watching and waiting in the lane, wondered if she thought of him.

By and by she rose, and took the flowers from her basket. There was a wreath of snowdrops and ivy for Lilian's grave; and one of golden and purple crocuses for Lilian's husband. But on her father's grave, with a touch of half-unconscious symbolism, she placed a cross of deep red blossoms plucked from a plant of *pyrus japonica* that grew against the Vicarage wall.

For Alice was living at the Vicarage, more as a daughter than a guest. Her paid companion had been dismissed. The Manor House was empty, and she found occupation and interest in the affairs of the parish, where indeed she soon became Mrs. Wykeham's right hand. She had been there ever since the day of her father's funeral, and it seemed to her almost like her rightful home.

The watcher drew more close. He had not seen her for many a long day,

and he wanted to feast his eyes upon her now.

She had never been so very robust-looking, he thought; but she was white and slender now as the snowdrops that she had laid upon his mother's grave. Her hair was golden and shining as ever; it looked like an aureole about her sweet, fine face. Were angels more beautiful? thought Harold, unconscious of profanity, as he gazed unseen at his lost love. But was she lost? He did not mean to lose her if he could help it—now.

The last flower was adjusted, and Alice turned to go. A bend in the path brought her face to face with Harold Crawford, who entered at that moment by the wicket-gate. If she could, she would have flown, but there was no place whither she could fly. She turned deeply red, and then very pale, but made no further movement. Perhaps, she thought, Harold would not care to speak to her. But he came steadily forward and held out his hand, into which she timidly placed her own. Hers was very cold—perhaps from contact with the flowers and wet moss—and he longed to retain it between his own. But after a moment's lingering, she drew it away; and they stood together without speaking in the pathway beside the graves.

“I have just come back,” he said, in hurried and rather uncertain tones.

She lifted her sweet eyes to his face for a moment, but did not speak. There was something in her throat that forbade her to articulate a word.

"I am glad to have found you here," he went on. And then, as if moved by the same instinct, they both turned and looked at his mother's grave. "Do you remember when I came home before, and found you putting flowers into the vases in my mother's room? And now you are laying them upon her grave."

"I always loved her," she said; and there were tears in her voice.

"She loved you, too," he answered.

His words seemed to break the ice of constraint which hung about her.

"O Harold," she said, bursting into tears, "if you can but forgive——"

"I forgave long ago," he answered.

"Did not Mr. Wykeham tell you that?"

"He has not talked to me of you."

"Then I must talk to you of myself. Alice, I have a great deal to say."

"No, no!" she said, shrinking away from him. "There is nothing for you to say—above all, here."

"This is just the place above all others in which I should choose to say it. First, let me speak of myself. You know the reason which your father gave for refusing his consent to our engagement?"

She bowed her head.

"That reason no longer holds good. He left a letter telling me that he had been—mistaken. He did, indeed, Alice. Why do you look at me so distrustfully? He took away his veto. He gave me a virtual permission to ask you again to be my wife. He showed most distinctly that he would have been pleased to think of me as your husband."

"Can I—can I see the letter?" she murmured. "It seems so unlike my father."

"Darling, the letter was not mine. It has been destroyed. But I assure you that I am speaking the truth. Do you not believe me?"

"Oh, yes; it is not that—but——"

"Well, dear, what?"

"I can never be your wife, Harold."

"Why not?" he asked.

He looked her steadily in the face, and her eyes drooped beneath his gaze. Willingly would she have kept silence; but she saw that his determination to have an answer was one that could not be lightly set aside. With stammering lips and tear-wet eyes, she tried to put her reason into words.

"I did not know, until lately," she said, "the story of your father's death."

"And is that all?"

"O Harold, it cannot be a slight thing to know how your father died."

"No, my sweet, anything but that.

And yet I ask you once more—is that all?"

"I have read the whole story in the newspapers—about my poor father's desire to investigate—everything"—she did not know how to put her meaning into words—"and about your mother, Harold; and the whole web of treachery and deceit in which my father was involved, and—I cannot feel it right that I shall ever be your wife."

"But, Alice, the story cannot be in the newspapers, because nobody knows it entirely except the vicar and me."

"People drew conclusions, I suppose," she said sadly, "and their conclusions seem to be true. You cannot deny it."

"No," he said, very gravely, "I cannot deny it. We had better face the truth, and see what comes of it, Alice, you and I. Your father did the things that he is reported to have done. For his own ends he took the body of my mother out of the grave, and struck the blow that laid my father in its place. In his last hours he wrote a letter—the one I have mentioned to you—telling the whole truth and asking for my forgiveness. And, Alice, I have granted it."

Her lips quivered, but she did not speak.

"I have granted it, not only because he asked it, but because I feel that his

sufferings were greater than the world will ever know, and also because I believe my father's death to have been the result of pure accident. And I want to know why we two should spoil our lives because of what our parents did? I will not submit to any such morbid and superstitious fancy. Even if your father had killed mine, Alice, knowingly and willfully, instead of accidentally; even then, if we two loved each other, it would be better that we should marry and atone to each other for our parents' sins and errors than languish out our lives apart. What reason is there, in reality, why we should not be man and wife?"

"The world would say that we were callous, unfeeling, wickedly indifferent."

"Let the world say what it likes," said Harold, taking her hand in his, "so that we know it is a mistake."

"But it will be so hard for you to bear!"

"Do you think it will be easier for me to live apart from the one woman in the world whom I can love?"

"O Harold, but do you think it right? As you say, let us forget what the world thinks, but ought we—ought we——"

"My dearest," said Harold, with deep feeling in his voice. "I believe that if they—they whose graves are here before us—can see and hear us now, they will feel that your father's errors

could not be more blessedly atoned than by the union of his child to the son of the friends whom he injured in this life. Look at the matter from the higher point of view, and I think you will see with me. Our love, dear, and our happiness shall make that sad and wretched story fade into oblivion. Think—if he can see you now—whether he would like to know that we were condemned to a life of unhappiness because of his error, his sin; would not that be a terrible punishment for him to bear? Let us wipe out the consequences of his action, as far as we can, by leading a good and happy life in spite of it.”

She let her head droop against his shoulder, and he knew that the day was won. But she made a protest still.

“I must ask the vicar what he thinks,” she murmured.

“I can tell you exactly what he thinks. It was he who wrote to me to come home; it was he who sent me to you now.”

“But what will people say?”

“Nothing; because they know nothing definitely. The story is but a rumor, which will die out the sooner because of our union, Alice, dear. Will you not be brave, and bear even the world’s disapproval for my sake? or don’t you love me well enough for that?”

“O Harold,” she said, “I love you better than all the world beside. But I

was thinking of you—I was afraid for you——”

“And even for me, my darling, you must be strong. I shall care for nothing, if only I have you to walk beside me all my life, and to make the happiness of my dear old home.”

“If love can make you happy,” she said softly, “you shall never have reason to complain.”

And then they walked away from the graves which held the tragedy of those three lives—walked away, hand in hand, with smiles upon their lips, but tears still within their eyes. Not in their highest happiness could they forget the past. But the grass grows green in the springtime, even over graves; and the mounds are half-hidden by coronals of flowers. And the cross of scarlet blossoms glistens in the twilight upon the suicide’s grave.

THE END.

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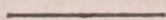
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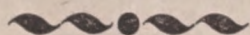
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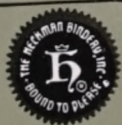
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